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# LIBRARY CHRONICLE

VOLUME XIII
1945

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# *The* UNIVERSITY *of* PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARY CHRONICLE

Issued
Four Times a Year by and for
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University of Pennsylvania

Vol 13 No 1 March 1945

he UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA
IBRARY CHRONICLE

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SEYMOUR THOMPSON EDITOR

# LIFE OF ROBERT MONTGOMERY BIRD

*Written By His Wife, Mary Mayer Bird*

(Third Instalment)

Vol 13 No 1 March 1945

# LIFE OF ROBERT MONTGOMERY BIRD

Written By His Wife, Mary Mayer Bird

Edited From Her Manuscript By C. Seymour Thompson
With Selections From Bird's Correspondence

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## IV. Seeking Health

The summer of 1829 Dr. Bird passed principally in New Castle, with the hope of recruiting his health, which began to fail under severe mental labour. A letter from his artist friend, John Grimes, refers to his efforts and improvement in painting: "I was pleased to hear that you 'improve every day'; that I should have known however after your telling me that you spend 6 or 8 hours a day at the easel." In the autumn he resolved to make a visit to the West, as the initiative in the course of travels that had long been a cherished idea. Eagerly desiring to witness the wonders that civilization had wrought in a region so recently a wilderness—to see the El Dorado that held out prospects of wealth to the strong heart and willing hand—to roam over the Bloody Hunting Grounds, of which he had read so much, and heard so many wild legends from his Kentucky friends, Black and Grimes—he proposed spending some months, perhaps a year, in that quarter, before proceeding to Mexico and South America.

Making arrangements, therefore, for a prolonged absence, he turned his face westward, and, by the canal and old stage-route through Pennsylvania, proceeded to Pittsburgh, and thence, by steamboat, to Cincinnati. Except the beautiful views drawn by him in his progress thither, few records are left of this journey, or of his winter's stay in the great Western metropolis. Out of sorts when he left home, the trip, against all reasonable expectation, did not improve him; and, settled on the banks of the Ohio, the climate or the water disagreed with him, and increased the languor and weakness daily stealing more and more upon him; in fact, during his whole stay, sickness and suffering darkened his enjoyment. Nevertheless, so vastly was he charmed with the scenery, and so gratifying were many circumstances connected with this

introduction to the Queen City, that he took several subsequent opportunities to renew the pleasure. The hospitality freely tendered him by some of the most prominent citizens, and the kindness and attention of many friends, old and new, as well as the opportunities for observation—limited though they were—relieved the gloom of the retrospect, and left a feeling of sober satisfaction when, in after years, he reverted to the events of this winter. Besides, with his usual good luck in this respect, he again had occasion to rejoice in the motherly attentions of a most kind-hearted land-lady, whose heart he so won that, not only did she her utmost to promote his comfort and recovery, but ever after manifested the greatest interest in his welfare. In addition, he was blessed with the society of his friend Grimes, then temporarily resident in the city.

Being confined a great deal indoors, the time must have passed rather drearily, but the evenings were enlivened by music or a game of chess, in which he soon became proficient. There were some superior players in the house, and the chess-board was regularly a source of entertainment. As a general rule, Dr. Bird never fancied or indulged in games of chance or skill; but this winter, unable to do much else, he, in this way, alleviated many a heavy hour, and was soon voted one of the most expert hands. Among the most frequent occupants of the board was a young couple, shortly to be united in marriage. Being rather excitable and proud of their skill, it was sometimes observed that interest in the game bid fair to overpower the tenderness belonging to their mutual relations; and one evening, in an unusually long contest, the rivalry waxed so strong as to threaten a decided quarrel. At this crisis, when every move made more imminent the danger of a rupture, the table at which they were playing was violently shaken, as if by the awkwardness or inadvertence of some one rising hastily. Confusion reigned among knights and castles, bishops and royal personages, and the game, nearly finished, was irretrievably broken up. But the storm was averted; and Dr.

Bird, apologizing with all humility, left the room, with a secret smile at the success of his expedient. A night's reflection brought some very just and common-sense views to the affectionate but irritable lovers, who, speedily composing their own differences, sought the Doctor, and, warmly thanking him for his timely interference, declared their intention to take his advice and never again engage together in this dangerous pastime. Their subsequent happiness proved that they remembered and acted up to their good resolutions.

One of the most agreeable incidents connected with this visit was his introduction to Hiram Powers, afterwards the distinguished sculptor. The acquaintance which followed ripened, in time, into the sincerest regard and good will. Hearing repeatedly the most liberal encomiums bestowed on a certain exhibition, representing the Infernal Regions, Dr. Bird visited it, and was beyond measure delighted and astonished at the genius displayed in the conception and execution of the extraordinary performance. The figures, among which the Arch Enemy, under the form of a huge serpent or dragon, acted a conspicuous part, were of wax, and so cunningly devised and managed as to fill the mind of the beholder with the liveliest emotions of amazement and awe. The contriver of these remarkable wax-works exhibited them in person, and proved to be as much an object of admiration from his youth, ingenuousness and modesty, as from his undoubted genius. He excited the warmest interest in the breast of his visitor; who, instantly appreciating his rare gifts, urged him to abandon the beautiful but perishable medium upon which his grand ideas were lavished, for the more noble marble. On many occasions afterwards, whether in learning the art of moulding or on a friendly call, Dr. Bird renewed the subject, with the gratifying result of contributing to raise in the young artist a higher estimate of his own powers, and a corresponding desire to overcome the obstacles that prevented their exercise in a legitimate sphere. The very interesting interchange of letters that ensued, a few years later, between

these two, shews the effect of this encouragement and advice, as well as of the opinions mutually entertained of each other's abilities.[21]

As week after week elapsed, and his illness increased rather than diminished, Dr. Bird became persuaded that the journey in prospect for him was not to Mexico and Peru, but to another world. Firmly impressed with the idea that he was about to die, he was filled with irrepressible longings to behold again his beloved home and the dear familiar faces of relatives and friends. So strong was this feeling that, weak and sick as he was, against the remonstrances of kind friends, whom he never expected to see again, he started, on one of the upward-bound boats, on his return. The journey, being by the stage route via Cumberland and Baltimore, was a most melancholy one. "I was very ill in the steamboat, and in the stage," he writes after his return, "and by the time I reached Baltimore, was fitter for a coffin than a castle" (alluding to some joke about castle-building). The horrible desolation of feeling he endured during that long unbroken ride, when sleep forsook him, and blindness attacked his weary eyes, and confusion and delirium usurped his active brain, who can describe? For fatigue and loss of rest during two entire days and nights, superadded to his previous exhaustion, produced such disastrous effect on his system that, quickly succeeding loss of sight, his reason began to totter, and left him enveloped in darkness, mental and visual. The driver, by whom he was

[21] Unfortunately we have none of Bird's letters to Powers, and only three from Powers to Bird. These are chiefly of interest in connection with Powers and his sculptural work. In one of them, however, February 1, 1835, he expressed his appreciation of the encouragement Bird had given him: "I have very few friends like you, and it gives me more pleasure to receive one word of encouragement from such a friend, than the approbation of a thousand common men. - - - - You speak of following me up the toilsome hill of distinction! Do not say so, but rather, that you will turn a windlass at the top to drag me after you. - - - - Towards you, Doctor, I shall ever cherish the warmest feelings of friendship and gratitude, for you have been one among the first to encourage me to persevere, and now that I am started, you lend me your powerful influence, and the cheering voice of your approbation."

seated, grew alarmed, first by his strange ramblings, then by his incoherent ravings; and, finally, after a consultation with the other passengers, landed him at the next way-side inn, consigning him, with many injunctions, to the landlord's care. He, like a good Samaritan, put him to bed, and paid him all requisite attention; and blessed sleep, long and uninterrupted, at last vouchsafed, restored him to sight and consciousness. Thus refreshed, he found himself able to resume his journey, and reached home without further mishap. The emotions awakened among his old comrades by his appearance are described in the letter mentioned above:

On leaving the steamer for the canal-boat, within 20 miles of *my home,* I suddenly lit upon an old acquaintance, who actually recoiled from my proffered hand, until I spoke to him. "Good God!" said he with the most terrific expression of amazement. "Is this you? Poor devil, you look like a rat. Have they been starving you in Ohio?" I met some half dozen more acquaintances before I reached New Castle. All of them agreed I looked like a ghost. But arrived at New Castle, who can describe the ridiculous mixture of joy and mortification that assailed me. "If that isn't Bird, may I never see snow! What brings him home again?" I produced as much stir as a ship returning from an exploring voyage. "What did you see? Is the Ohio as big as a tide-dyke, or the Canal?" "Are the Cincinnattians *all* Indians?" "Are the squaws pretty?" "Poor fellow, did you ever see such a sack of bones?"

In another from Philadelphia, whither he returned when his native air, good nursing and feeding had put a little flesh on his bones, and made him look more like a Christian, he gives utterance to his rapture in finding himself once more in "the city of his love" and adoption:[22]

The clean and beautiful streets, with the beautiful and happy faces that sparkle through them; the green, fresh, and flourishing squares, echoing with the light-hearted and musical shouts of children; and then, if one walks into the country, the noble Delaware with its fleets of white-winged vessels, that flit past each other on the ruffled waters, like

[22] This was written to his Cincinnati landlady and her daughter.

flocks of sea-birds in a not much more heavenly element; the quiet and sequestered Schuylkill, with its verdant bowers, its cool and pleasant retreats, and its magical solitudes, where, whensoever a clod-hearted fellow like myself goes rambling, he begins to bethink him of a variety of poetical things, and especially the ladies, and how, dear souls! he could love them all in such an Elysium of a place; and—But another word would lead me into rhapsody, and I am growing too old for that. In a word, then, Philadelphia is about the sweetest place in existence, and it is only necessary for you to spend a few months in it, to agree with me.

These letters, here introduced as the only accessible written mementoes of this journey, bear date of May, 1830, and shew that he was only then recovered from his winter's troubles, and satisfied, for the present, to abandon all thoughts of further travel.

## V. Early Dramas

Upon the complete restoration of health, Dr. Bird returned, with new zeal, to his literary labours, and, during the fall, put the finishing stroke to *Pelopidas.* Of earlier productions of any pretension, I find *The Cowled Lover,* a tragedy (June, 1827), *Caridorf, or, the Avenger,* a tragedy (August, 1827), *The City Looking Glass,* a comedy (July, 1828), complete; and a number of unfinished dramas and novels: "Giannone," "Isidora, or, the Three Dukes," "King Philip, or, the Sagamore" (1829); "News of the Night," "The Fanatick," "Tony, the Radical," "Men of the Hills," and others, besides a good deal of poetry. He contributed, I have reason to think, considerably to periodicals—critiques, etc. Then, and subsequently, he exerted himself for the passage of the International Copyright law; appealed to at one time (1836) by the British authors, through Miss Martineau, he cooperated with them, and met with the usual want of success.

*Pelopidas,* more than fulfilling, in conception, execution, and dramatic effect, the promise of its predecessors, was hailed with unqualified admiration and delight by a few privileged friends, and with marked approval by less interested critics to whom it was submitted. By their unanimous advice it was offered for representation to Mr. Edwin Forrest, who had already greatly distinguished himself, and was rapidly rising to the first rank in his profession. The negotiations to this effect were entrusted by Dr. Bird to two of his warmest friends [Black and McClellan], who were also ardent admirers of Mr. Forrest, and resulted in an arrangement whereby Mr. Forrest became entitled to act this play, as well as others to be written, if mutually agreed upon, on certain conditions, deemed by these gentlemen highly advantageous

to both parties. However, before measures could be taken for the production of *Pelopidas,* its author became convinced that the tragedy he was then preparing with especial reference to Mr. Forrest's peculiar powers, which he had since been studying, would serve as a more fitting introduction to the world than one not thus particularly designed. For this reason he withdrew the latter, and substituted *The Gladiator,* which had been finished early in the spring.

Though it met this obscure fate, *Pelopidas* was always regarded by Dr. Bird as among his best works. Without fully concurring in this high opinion, it is certain that the play has merits which would have given it some degree of success upon the stage, and added to the author's reputation. The first three acts may be regarded as too quiet and passive for stage effect, being devoted chiefly to the evolution of character and preparation for the events that follow, and the piece has but seldom the fire and tempest of action which make *The Gladiator* so successful; but the descriptions of character and manners are done with as masterly a hand; the complications of the plot, the various unforeseen and sudden difficulties and dangers that surround the exiles in the city; the adventures of Pelopidas; his unscrupulous daring; the struggle in his breast between the feelings of a patriot and a husband; the many accidents that almost disclose and ruin the conspiracy; its varying fortunes and ultimate triumph, give an interest at once natural and romantic. At a later period Dr. Bird declined, from reasons highly characteristic, the production of this drama under other auspices.

The circumstances under which *The Gladiator* was written, subjected its author to great disadvantages; the necessity of sacrificing all the characters to the principal one, of concentrating on that one, almost exclusively, the interest, and nearly all the action, entailed difficulties and embarrassments to be overcome successfully only by masterly dexterity and boldness, and enhances the merit of this most appreciated of Dr. Bird's works.

It was intended to bring out *The Gladiator* before the warm season, but many obstacles concurred to prevent this until the autumn. The intense anxiety with which the young author and his nearest friends awaited the reception of this, the first published effort, may be imagined only by those who have undergone similar experiences. In this case there was more than the usual occasion for fears and misgivings. While many generous souls were ready with words of encouragement and kindness to welcome the young poet to the position he boldly aspired to, there were not wanting others—and those most influential—who ridiculed the idea of a tragedy written by a man—and he an American—of barely twenty-five; the presumption of the attempt was sufficient ground for condemnation; such vanity, impudence and fool-hardiness should be crushed at once; in fact, they did their best to condemn the play beforehand. It was acted, however, for the first time, on the evening of September 26, 1831, in New York. Excepting Forrest, the actors most miserably performed their parts; the scenic arrangements were execrable; yet was *The Gladiator* a perfect triumph.

It is needless to give any particular account of a tragedy which has been performed so often, and with such unvarying success, in all parts of the United States; but it is due to the author's memory to remark, that the most distinguished characteristics of the play shut out from common view other merits almost as great. Stage effect is, undoubtedly, its first and prominent quality; and many consider that, because it has this, it has nothing more. Dr. Bird himself dismissed it with the description "full of blood and thunder"; and it is natural that these glaring virtues should blind us to the more peaceful and quiet merits, which are as necessary to a true literary work. But this, the author's best-known work, is not one of those productions that owe their success to the glitter of the footlights, and a deep voice in the actor; it will bear reading as well as hearing, and show new beauties under the process. Having never been published, it has been judged merely by

its *acting* merits; and the literary character of a play can never be established till it is printed.[23] *The Gladiator* has not merely stage effect, but human feeling and moral tone; and some of the finest poetry Dr. Bird ever wrote, is in its dialogues and soliloquies. We need only refer to the speech of Spartacus to the Roman envoy (Act iv, scene iii)—especially the celebrated line

> Where peace was tinkling on the shepherd's bell
> And singing with the reapers.

The complete and brilliant success of *The Gladiator* established Dr. Bird's reputation at once; by the first real effort, fame was won. Had he chosen to rest on his laurels, and never write another line, his name would have lived; had he bent a willing ear to the notes of honest admiration and fulsome flattery that sounded on all sides, and yielded to the eager solicitations of ardent friends and feast-giving literati-seekers, he would have become a lion—a popular idol, for which his rare social gifts well qualified him. But his ambition looked not in that direction, and soon breaking loose from such distractions and fascinations, he retired into that privacy best suited to his pursuits and inclinations.

In the spring of 1832 occurred a change in household arrangements. The brothers with whom he had been domesticated having removed from Philadelphia, Dr. Bird determined to establish a home of his own. This he could the more readily do as his pecuniary prospects were now such as to justify a more liberal outlay than when his legacy formed his sole dependence. That inheritance, though in truth less than the annual expenditure of many an exquisite of this day, had educated and, by prudent management, supported him until he was in a fair way of earning his own bread, and now he had well grounded hopes of securing for himself a competency, if not wealth. The profits of a successful dramatist have been stated, and are popularly believed, to be enormous, and the

[23] It was first published in Foust's *Life and Dramatic Works of Robert Montgomery Bird* in 1919.

overflowing houses that always greeted *The Gladiator* seemed about to realize the expectations of the two friends who, on finishing the contract for its representation by Mr. Forrest, "shook hands, congratulating each other that now Bird's fortune was made, even if he never wrote another line," and this confidence gave them the greater satisfaction as they well knew from the peculiar temper of his mind, his holy horror of debt, and extreme sensitiveness as to pecuniary embarrassments, that bothers of this sort would weigh heavily upon him, and seriously interfere with the exercise of a profession more than all others requiring a serene and undisturbed mind.

One object Dr. Bird had in view in this new arrangement was to afford a settled home to his mother, who had been subjected to many changes and trials. She was, accordingly, installed mistress of the moderate-sized house in 12th Street he rented and furnished, and provided with a companion in one whom, in her days of affluence, she had introduced into her household, a young and unprotected orphan. Kitty Thompson was one of that class of home-treasures, unhappily now so rare—if not altogether extinct—whose housewifely talents, faithful services, and devoted attachment, confer countless blessings, while they merit lasting gratitude. Merging her individual interests in those of this family and Mr. Van Dyke's (for after Mr. Bird's death she resided with the latter), her early affections and life-long ministrations were given to their different members, and especially to those who, born after she became an inmate, seemed, in a manner, more particularly her own. She loved them all; yet was there not one, in her eyes, like Montgomery; he was her idol, her model of perfection. For him no service was too burdensome, no sacrifice too great. To promote his comfort was her study; to save him from harm she would have willingly met any dangers or difficulties. Need it be said such devotion was appreciated, and she held in honour and esteem by those she so faithfully loved and served. From this time till their death, Dr. Bird's dwelling was the home of both.

In the 12th Street house the chief of our author's remaining works were penned. First in point of time was the tragedy *Oralloossa,* which was written, like *The Gladiator,* expressly for Mr. Forrest. As this was not brought out until the autumn, we defer further immediate mention of it, to introduce a letter of this summer, which, it may be remarked, was the season of the cholera's first appearance in our eastern cities. The letter, dated August 21, 1832, was to John Frost, at Jamaica Plain, near Boston.

Amado Amigo,

There is something in the very name of your retreat, that fills me with melancholy and envy. Jamaica-plain may be agreeable or not; but the ideas it associates of islands and champaigns, make me feel a little discontented in the City of Hospitals. I expected to have heard from you sooner, but was obliged to rest satisfied with such intelligence as I could pick up among your friends.

Give my kindest regards to Mrs. Frost, and Miss Benditt. I, for one, would be glad to find them in Philadelphia again.

You all desire to be remembered to *the ladies. What* ladies? Ah, you sinners! do you mean the adorable Caroline, and the divine Mary? If so, then your inquiry is a most excellent piece of delight; for I will make an excuse of it to pay them a visit. Last night I heard Miss C. play several duets with Miss Graff; and Miss G's piano being a grand one, the duets were of course sublime. As for Miss M., she is more celestial than ever. If Mrs. Frost were here, how we would talk about her!

Three days with Mr. Webster, in a stage coach! Fy on it, and I, during those three days, was doubtless scratching my head for a single idea, while you were picking them up, as fast as you could pocket them, from the lips of the Yankee Tully! There is nothing could have given me more pleasure than to have traveled those three days with Mr. W. except perhaps to have heard him pronounce his adoration of the Stripes and the Stars.—His respect for De Foe can't be greater than mine. I think, in my childhood, I must have read nearly all his novels, for he was then my idol: I recollect however but little of them save Crusoe and the Voyage Round the World. Nevertheless I remember enough to be persuaded that they gave no more hints to Walter Scott than did the Greek tragedies to Shakspeare. If we must have originals for

Scott, we can find them without going back so far. Of the many styles of English romances, there are three peculiarly great and noble. The first was adopted (or, if you choose, *invented*) by De Foe; the second by Fielding; the third by Scott. The first is the most simple; it is a precise imitation of nature and of truth—a copy of the more obvious features of humanity and incident. We feel, with such a novel in our hands, as if we were reading the true memoirs of a man who has lived, and seen something to talk about. To write such, a man should ramble about the world, and then record his adventures, without giving way to sentiment and imagination. The extraordinary verisimilitude of De Foe's novels is proved every day: you know that his history of the Plague (a romance) deceived one or two of the most famous English doctors of another day; his Voyage has deluded thousands, and would yet, were it not that our present perfect knowledge of the geography of the South Seas, knocks every chapter on the head. De Foe has had no imitators, because he cannot be imitated by a man who cannot, or who will not, entirely discard those qualities on which men are most apt to pride themselves, and rest contented with his naked nature. Fielding's style is De Foe's augmented by imagination; and Scott's is formed of both, adorned with sentiment, and regulated by pure taste. These are what the doctors would call the pathognomics of the three styles. * * * *

Thine truly,

R. M. Bird

During this and several succeeding years, many of Dr. Bird's most beautiful fugitive pieces were thrown off, among them the sonnets, and songs of deeper feeling. He cultivated Italian, studied Petrarch (in reference to the sonnet), and the other great masters of that poetic tongue, and wrote considerable music. Some of the tenderest, most touching melodies, highly suggestive of Beethoven, were the breathings of his soul. Natural objects often furnished his themes: the chirping of insects, the notes of the wood-robin or whippoorwill, the sighing or roaring of the wind, were set to music. Such occasions scarcely ever passed without their record; so keen were the perceptive faculties, so alive the sensibilities. Often the same scrap of paper would contain his ideas in the

triple form of verse, sketch, and music. Of compositions of this latter class, perhaps the only one published is a national hymn, "God Bless America"; this, when played from recollection, and imperfectly, before a distinguished professor, drew from him warm commendation. Almost all his music, as the greater part of his poetry, savoured of pensiveness or melancholy: his correspondence, on the contrary, was spirited and piquant.

*Oralloossa* was first performed in Philadelphia, in the Arch Street Theatre, October 10, 1832. It is the least in eminence, and, perhaps, in merit, of Dr. Bird's dramatic works. It has spirit, interest, and pathos, but in a less degree than are to be found in *The Gladiator* and *The Broker of Bogota.* The play was acted with success for a few nights, and then withdrawn and was never subsequently produced. The extreme gorgeousness and costliness of dress and trappings are, perhaps, one reason why it has ceased from the stage.

## VI. Travel in the South

In the spring of 1833 our author made an extended journey through the South and West, with the partial intention, dependent upon certain contingencies, of passing over into Mexico and perhaps Peru. The realization of this latter half-formed plan was frustrated by news from home, as well as by the failure of supplies he had counted on. A few extracts from his correspondence illustrate the leading incidents of this journey, and forcibly point to the contrasts between the ease and rapidity of travel at this day, and the delays and dangers of the road a quarter of a century ago.

Charleston, April 14th, 1833.

Oh the jollifications of a voyage in a ship six foot by seven! Oh the delights of a sea diet of corned beef and oranges! Oh the harmony of winds, waters, and sea-sick passengers! Oh the breakers and the bundles of North Carolina shingles, the whales and Mother Carey's chickens, the thunderstorms and the flying-fishes, the torn canvas and the lost hats, the rainbows and the porpoises! Oh the general joys of the big Ocean all round Cape Hatteras, farewell! I give ye up for the sandflies and rain-water, the roses and hominy, the niggers and numskulls, the rugged streets and stupid taverns of this Tophet of the South, this Gehenna of the States, this Rome of the New World, the New Jerusalem of Liberty—Charleston, South Carolina! You may stare, in your "bleak and northern clime," over the transports of a man who has just been eating radishes under the shade of a fig tree,—or, what's the same thing, a Pride of China. Mourn, mourn; go to Washington Square, and count the buds, and think of me making love to an aloe, ogling a honey-suckle, sighing soft things to a myrtle; go out to Schuylkill, and look for a blue-bird, and when you have found one, just consider I am at the same moment eaves-dropping to a mocking-bird; fling fresh coal into the grate, and when you are getting comfortable, think of me twirling a feather-fan at an open window which overlooks the placid bay of Charleston,—that is, it would overlook it, if there were not too many ugly houses in the way.

Charleston, April 14th, 1833.[24]

Dear little children,

Here am I, at last, among the Nullifiers, the birds, and the flowers; and really if there is any thing to make me particularly disconsolate, it is because "ye twa" can share none of the blisses which the sweet Spring is showering upon me. - - - - Here am I all alone, and I can do just what I choose. I don't intend to give you any account of the pleasant parts of my journey and adventures, until I get home; but the horrors, which I am not so good at remembering, I will record for you whenever I have an opportunity.

So now, instead of going into ecstatics about the land, I will skip back to the Atlantic, and discourse to you a little concerning the wonders of the Deep, and the adventures of an eight-days' voyage. Good Friday saw eight or ten such sinners as myself "cabin'd, cribb'd, confined," in a vessel about as big as a teakettle, and capering out to sea like a sturgeon. - - - - On board of our skiff were all kinds of odd fish. There was a Chinese cook, whose dainties pleased me not half so much as did his races after pots and platters every now and then during a lee-lurch or so, and the more especially that, when he did not succeed in capturing the runaway, the pot or platter as the case might be, was apt to turn about, and go in full chase after the cook. Then there was a French Steward, working his passage, who commonly came down the companionway (the cabin stairs,) side foremost; and ever and anon, when the storm roared loud enough to make such music agreeable, fell to consoling himself with the Marseilles Hymn, wherein he made divers new modulations according to which sore rib his heart was thumping on. There were an Englishman and his wife, in a mighty great pickle all the time; two shabby Irish gentlemen, who cursed Cape Hatteras four days without stopping; a young Yankee from Cape Cod, or Nahant, or some such place; two sentimental gentlemen (including your humble servant) and two or three others, who were sentimental as long as their grog lasted, and, after that, turned to grumbling. * * * *

One night—it was Sunday night too (and I was thinking how happy you must be at home if your throats were only well)—that night, we had such a gale of wind as, in the mate's lingo, pulled out more of his hair than a finetoothed comb. Then [came the] tug of war—then did we scud under bare poles, and roll about in our den, like

[24] Written to Mary Mayer and her sister Caroline.

[dried] peas in a child's rattle; then was every man sick as a dog, and bewailing his fate, except poor me,—for to tell the truth, although I was as sick as any body else, and horribly frightened, the whole scene about me was so unutterably ridiculous, that for the life of me I could not help laughing all the time. - - - - The sentimental gentleman had brought a volume of Byron along with him, and was eternally reading aloud the various rhapsodies about salt water with which B's rhyme abounds, although one of the unsentimental had remonstrated, declaring he, for his part, did not think the ocean was all it was cracked up to be. "O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea" was eternally dinged in our ears; but, methought, Sunday afternoon the passage trembled on the spouter's tongue; by night it had ceased. At midnight, hearing him groan unutterable things, especially divers ejaculations of a very heart-rending kind, I could not resist raising my voice above the general din, and shouting from my berth, "O'er the glad waters, &c." Now opened the floodgates of his wrath—"Curst waters, d - - - d black sea! Curse Byron! Curse the sea, and all that concerns both of 'em!" * * * *

New Orleans, May 18th, 1833.[25]

* * * * I never was so mistaken in my life, my dear Mrs. F. as when I began to dream there was any thing funny beyond the Schuylkill, or aught delectable farther than where flowed the ugly old Delaware. Thinks I to myself, the Sea is a very grand place, where one will be marvellously amused. Oh, I was marvellously amused to be sure; but I resolved in my own secret mind, Get me but once out of thy clutches, thou great, ugly, green and blue monster, and see when I will pay thee the next visit! Then thought I, In the solitudes of the pine-barrens of Georgia, I shall feel very poetical; and among the Muscogee groves, I shall see wandering red men, and verify mine old visions of romance. In those solitudes, I saw the green forest kings, and doubtless should have been in a fine frenzy while riding over them (ask Mr. F. to define a Corduroy), had my ribs allowed me. And in the Muscogee groves, I saw the proud warriors; but they always came to sell green strawberries, and beg tobacco. * * * *

[25] Apparently written to Mrs. John Frost.

New Orleans, May 8th, 1833.[26]

(Wednesday—but not *black* Wednesday.)

Oh you dear wretches! if you have ever heard of the man lost in the great Mammoth Cave of Kentucky, who, after wandering about in darkness for many days and nights, lifted up his eyes to the black and flinty roof of his prison, to make his last appeal to heaven, and beheld the Morning Star shining through the entrance of the Cavern; if you have ever heard me tell you how, once, as I rambled during a midsummer day, among the hot and suffocating sandhills of Cape May, and lay down at last under a pine tree to die of thirst, the cry of "The Light House! Water, water, fresh water!" brought me to my senses and my feet, and sent me scampering with life and joy through the woods—*then* may you imagine me, day before yesterday, arriving at my hotel, after a journey which I shall remember for life as a ten days' nightmare, exhausted, spiritless, sick,—sullenly demanding a chamber wherein I intended to lock myself from the world—you may imagine, you dearest sinners of the earth, how I was affected when mine host, after demanding whether he should not prefix a *Dr.* to my name, and receiving a dejected assent, said with an angelical smile, "I have expected you, sir, and have letters for you," and displayed immediately a handful of them, among which was one green as the first leaf, lovely as the first bud of a rose tree—the first sight of which was like the draught at the Light House, or the view of the Morning Star—or any other thing in the world that can make a miserable man happy. - - - - I ran down to the Mississippi. Said I to myself, "I will read this letter on the glorious river, and I will feel magnificent!" I felt magnificent, and I said, "I will write a two-sheet answer." I began my two-sheet answer, when in came a rascal. I rose up to cane him—He had another letter—I almost kissed him! * * * *

I brought with me from the Alabama river a collection of buds of the great Magnolia—the most majestic of flowering trees. I saw its gigantic flowers shining aloft, among the dark green leaves, like planets —they seemed like so many Evening Stars. I clambered among the branches after them, lubber as I was, and after risking my neck thrice a dozen times, succeeded in securing such a knot of them as set all the lady passengers half mad. - - - - This vile South is the clime of flowers;

[26] This and the two letters following were written to Mary and Caroline Mayer.

the river banks and pine barrens are alike *(sic)* with them. You may rest sometimes in one spot, and see whole acres of wild woodbine, in the shadow of the forest, the scarlet and the pale; endless expanses of wild pinks, one variety of which is exceedingly fragrant; great beds of the delicate goatsbeard; wild lilies; wild lilacs; wild roses; and a thousand others which I know nothing about. Even the deserts here blossom like the rose; and the steril woodlands, which the hand of oppression is this moment wresting from the poor Creeks, are all full of beauty.

Talking of Creeks, I saw one fellow, one day, stalking near some wigwams, who was really as noble in figure and carriage, and as picturesque in costume, as I have ever imagined a wild man to be. He was full six feet high, admirably made—a fact with which he was well acquainted, since he had cased his limbs in tight leggings and wore a short tunic, so as to make the most of them. This tunic had all the usual fringes and furbelows; and besides garnishing his person with divers pouches and beads, he had crowned his flowing hair with quite a gorgeous-looking scarlet turban; and he carried a rod in his hand that looked like the baton of a field marshal. As this creature approached me with the strut and port of a god, his head elevated, his eyes neither seeking nor shunning me, but shining now to the right and now to the left, as if he felt himself the guardian spirit of his tribe—the very Wahconda of the Muscogees (Pronounce Mus-co′-gehs—the g hard, and the e as the French e sans accent)—and had nothing to do with looking after white men—it struck me there was something in his carriage very like such a swagger of self esteem as I had seen in Fornasari,[27] the last time I saw him glorifying himself in Broadway. The very oddity of this resemblance between two such men rather inclined me to merriment; and when I had saluted the gentleman, and received no other return than a most magnificent and imperial grunt (for really the savage was too proud to look at me, or to move his hand) I was so tickled at his vainglory that I burst into a laugh. This insult, for which I was instantly sorry—for his pride was the only possession of which my countrymen had not robbed him—stung him. He halted, wheeled half round, falling into an attitude really majestic and Apollo-like, and gave me a look of such fierce and fiery intensity that I began to wish I had my pistols about me. However I

[27] Luciano Fornasari, Italian opera singer, who had won great popularity in New York in 1832 and 1833.

was obliged to put the best face on the matter; and so, changing my laugh to a smile, I made him a low bow, with a wave of the hand as pompous as I could make it, which he imitating, and adding to it another grunt which seemed to me to have more of the character of a Christian How-d'ye-do, he strode haughtily away.

You must not be surprised to find me on foot and alone in the wilderness. Such was several times my condition—and such will often be the fate of travellers who confide in the roads and mail contractors of Georgia and Alabama. In truth the term of my journey from the Savannah river to the Alabama was a series of privations and sufferings which sorely tried my philosophy. The first night on the road, I broke down, and rode twenty-three miles in a corn wagon. The second was one of adventure and more distress. There were two drivers; three passengers occupied the little space left in the coach by an unusual number of great mails. We were approaching Macon; it was eleven o'clock at night; cloudy; my fellow travellers were asleep, and I, just sinking into pleasant visions. I dreamed I was walking with you two on the Schuylkill looking for violets (I have not seen one since I left Philadelphia) and had strayed from you down the river bank, when you cried out to me by name, "Come here! come here!" I was springing up the hill to join you, when I woke—the stage coach was upsetting! I was undermost—but climbing that bank in my sleep to join you, saved me from being crushed; my head was already out, and I was not hurt. Were you not my guardian angels? The coach had tumbled into a deep ravine; the tongue was broken; the frighted horses were plunging back upon us; still, in the disorder of my senses, I dreamed you were calling me, and I made another effort, which placed me in safety. No one was injured: we mended the vehicle as well as we could; and sending it forward with both drivers and the more important mail bags, consented to remain with the rest of Uncle Sam's property and our own luggage until another coach could be sent for us.

Before midnight we were alone. My two companions wrapped themselves in their cloaks, and sheltering themselves under bushes and their umbrellas, soon fell asleep. For myself, as I was persuaded we should have a bad night; as I knew to sleep on the damp ground, and in the rain, would do any thing but cure a vile throat I had brought with me from Charleston, I resolved to watch until relieved by the return of the carriage. So I seated myself on my trunk and cloak

bag, rested against a fallen trunk, and began to consider my situation.

We were on a descent, at the bottom of which, and across the road, ran a little swampy rivulet. Beyond this was a winding ridge, covered, as indeed was all the country about us, except in the marshy hollows, with a lofty and endless forest of pines. We were lying at the junction of the swamp and pines, so that the rank undergrowth of the one was mingled with the tall trees of the other. A few paces below us, a by road, leading to distant plantations, crossed the highway obliquely. I kept my eyes open for a long time without difficulty; I had ample opportunity of studying the woods in night and solitude; I amused myself by endeavouring to determine and note the proper melody of the whip-poorwills, several of which were screaming at intervals all night down in the hollow; I tried to ascertain the points of the compass, and satisfy myself whereaway, as the sailors say, lay Philadelphia,—a matter I succeeded in when, at last, the clouds parted and gave me a view of the Great Bear, and then, of course, I kept my eyes in that direction, and thought over a thousand pleasant things that made me melancholy, until I became as sentimental as the hero of such an occasion should be. Then too, in harmony with such feelings, came the gushing of the wind through the pine tops—a strange, mournful, wild, and, sometimes, an unearthly music. Now you would hear it whispering on a distant hill, —approaching, and increasing as it approached, until you fancied it the rattle of the coming coach over the re-echoing roads; then, as it came nearer, and extended right and left, and shook the boughs over my head, it seemed to me like the noise of a flight of spirits winging over the solemn deserts; and then, as it fled farther and farther and sank lower and lower, it was like the rush of a waterfall heard afar, and the few leaves stirring about me seemed like the sighings of a living creature in the tree tops. Sometimes the breeze lay so dead, I could hear, or fancy I heard, little birds stirring on their perches; without any fancy at all, I could distinguish the tread of rabbits [rustling] the pine straw (so they call the fallen pine leaves) and they often ran out by me. Once I heard the baying of dogs at a distance, and soon afterwards a plunging and crackling in the wood, and immediately some animal, which I suppose was a deer, dashed over the road within a few rods of me! Now and then fell some drops of rain; but often the clouds would part and give token of a fair morning. Once or twice I thought I heard the footfall of a man, or some larger animal, in the wood, but it did not occur to me to think of savage monsters yet. You have no

idea how very lonesome and desolate I felt; it seemed to me as if the sense of solitude was increased by the presence of the two sleepers, who lay like dead men at my feet. I wished often they had gone with the stage coach.

Some time after 2 o'clock (I could only tell the hours by feeling the hands of my watch), thinking of that stupid place, Philadelphia, I got drowsy, and began to nod. Now, whether it was a fact or a dream, I can't say, but several times, when in this heavy state, I was started out of my propriety by the falling of feet and crackling of twigs, as I thought, in the little angle of bushes at the forking of the roads; yet when giving my whole attention to this spot, I never could be certain I heard a repetition of the sound. So I persuaded myself I had been dreaming,—resolved to dream no more, and fell fast asleep. Did I dream of Philadelphia? Not a whit. Still seemed I to sit at the roadside among the luggage, looking disconsolately down the hollow, and listening for the tardy coach. Again rose a distant rattle on the hills—It was no longer the wind: the villainous contractors had not forgot us—the coach was coming—I could hear its wheels crashing over the pebbly ridges, and descending into the valley, whose thick darkness I strove again to pierce. Well! the shadows parted—a coach appeared—one—another—a third—What was the meaning of that? Gaily and rapidly they issued from the gloom, and rolled up the hill—they were full of people, and as they passed me (for pass they did) many a strange face peeped out on me, and many a strange hand waved me a mocking salutation. The first and second passed me,—Would the third also? As it drew nigh, I strove to rise, but seemed chained to the pine tree as tightly as was ever Prometheus to his rock—yet I could speak, and wave my hand; and methought, as there were fair souls in that carriage, they would have pity on me. How my heart beat when as they looked out on me, I saw *your own* two faces turned round on me! But you would not stop—you waved your hands, and smiled, and left me. Your coach was vanishing up the hill—I became furious and frantic, and broke from the thraldom of the pine tree. I started up and listened, confused and agitated, to hear the wheels still rattling: not a pebble moved on the road, not a leaf stirred in the wood; but behind me, in the very heart and silence of the forest, heard so distinctly as to be no longer a matter of doubt, came the pattering of feet. They were on the little cross road, striking audibly on the hard earth, and not twenty paces from me.

I sat down with a sort of stupid instinct, and was convinced some animal was drawing nigh. I could have roused one of my companions with my foot, but was ashamed—Why should I think the beast was a dangerous one? Besides he will follow his path, and cross the road below, without seeing us. Suddenly his course was changed—he moved into the bushes, coming straight on the party. I felt for a pistol which in the evening I had placed in my pocket—it was gone: I lost it in the overturn, and did not find it till morning. I was entirely unarmed; and the moment I made this discovery, out came the beast from the bushes not ten feet from me! It was a bear! Lord, how I was scared! I kicked my companion, I gave a shout, I grasped up something to knock the bear on the head—it was my hat box! Think of that! I was going to knock out a bear's brains, with a pasteboard bandbox,—which would have beaten David in the matter of Goliah *(sic)* beyond all argument. But the dastard would not wait the encounter—he took to his heels with prodigious haste. I never saw a bear so frightened in all my life.[28]

* * * * It is hard to get a chance to write in this odd city. I am drawn off every time I want to begin, by some polite gentleman or other, who would challenge me, if I showed the least desire to get rid of him. I begin to doubt whether I have yet seen a man who has not killed at least one or two friends in the amiable way of duelling. Homicides are here thick as hops, and mighty merry dogs they are. You recollect seeing 6 or 7 weeks ago the account in the papers of a gentleman riding in the suburbs, and meeting a fighting party just as one of the prin-

[28] That Bird gave painstaking care to composition of this long letter is shown by comparison of two copies, one written the day after his arrival in New Orleans and not sent, and another, which he mailed, written the next day. In general the second draft follows the first very closely, but there are many changes in wording, some of which seem to have been carefully designed as an improvement. In the first draft this account of the vanquishment of the bear is as follows: "It was a bear! I was most horribly frightened. I kicked my neighbour, and at one and the same time, as I caught at something for protection, I uttered what was meant for a shout. I don't know what sort of a sound it was, but Bruin made a halt, turned round a little bush, and came to a second stand, staring at me, evidently greatly amazed to find himself in such company. At that instant, I gave the bear another shout, and the traveller another kick, which served the purpose of rousing the latter worthy, and of sending the former off into the bushes, nearly treading upon the other sleeper in his fright. Bless us! how we were frightened! And so was the bear. He was not a very big one, but he was monstrous ugly."

cipals, "a splendid young man," was shot through the brain. Yesterday I saw the survivor and victor, the *cousin* of the deceased, who has since fought *another cousin,* and is no doubt preparing to fight a third, for when I saw him, he was practising at the pistol gallery. He is a sprightly little Creole rascal. I could tell you odd things about these duellists, if I had time. * * * *

Nashville, June 14th, 1833.

* * * * Do you want a journal of my miseries for the last month? It would delight my soul to record them,—but I can't give you another black Wednesday. When we get together once more at the fall of the leaves—when I find myself, once more, one of the group at the Round Table—if heaven allows me such happiness—then when the evening rains are plashing at the windows, and the North winds whistling through the keyhole, I will look round on your merry faces, and bethink me, with a light heart, of my perils and escapes among the savage floods and roaring forests of this howling land. Then will I make your blood run cold, while I carry you among exploding and snagging steamers, suffocate you in a Cholera village, drown you in a stage coach, stun you with a thunderbolt, or whelm you under a falling forest. You shall ramble in the swamps of the Tennessee, till the odours of the vegetable pestilence sicken in your nostrils, and the chill of these living deaths—the river forests—enters heavily into your hearts; you shall—But why should I spoil an evening's amusement, especially when I have no time to expatiate? * * * *

You are not to be frightened to find my course lying so much among the Cholera regions. I have been in contact with the scourge for 5 or 6 weeks—from New Orleans to Nashville. Its ravages here have been mournful in the extreme; but it has greatly abated, and is now, perhaps, on the point of ceasing. As for myself, although exposed day and night on the road, and constantly harrassed in body and mind, I have suffered nothing but a cold, which is now gone. Indeed, I was never in better health than at the present moment, as you would say, if you could behold my mahogany face and leathern hands. The work of a whole year has not been *all* in vain. I have lost all you taught me, to be sure, but a week's scolding will bring me back again. Don't doubt that. You have spoiled me for all such fun as can be found in these regions. I think Hoogers, Roarers, and, in general, all the geniuses of the river and prairie are mighty dull stupid rascals; and I wish I was back in Philada. * * * *

The last letter written on this expedition which has been preserved is the following, written from Cincinnati:

Cincinnati, June 26th, 1833.

Ah, you wretches! you sit at home, painting and playing the piano, as happy and merry as grigs, while, all the time, I am breaking my heart, and my neck, over the various stumbling-blocks that my unlucky Star (not the Evening, for *la stella di Sera* has deserted me) is daily (or rather nightly) dropping on my path; now, perhaps, you are paying a visit, and smiling in somebody's face, while, at the very moment, I am carving your names on some melancholy beech tree, by the bank of a river; now you are eating your dinner, while I am wondering where I am to get mine, or cogitating mournfully over a gourd of sour milk and a morsel of corn bread; now you are strolling through Washington Square, while I am on a Kentucky Knob, looking for the farthest and bluest hill that lies away East and by North, as the sailors say; now you are admiring an evening gust, while I am defying its pitiless pelting in a wheeled colander, which they call a mail coach, among the blackjack barrens of the land of caves; now you are saying your prayers, and as you say them, I am diving deeper and deeper, with a gloomy torch, into the dark and fathomless chambers of the earth, and then, while you are tranquilly sleeping and dreaming about every body but my dear self, I scramble about looking for new caverns, wherein I scratch your names in a very handsome style where nobody will be apt to find them.

If you had only been with me in the Mammoth Cave! Often did I wish it. You would have been terrified, horrified, and perhaps petrified. What lovely stalactites you would make! But I thought of your hearts of stone, and trembled for your fate. You would have beautified some lonely chamber for a while; fantastical lunatics, like myself, would have smoked your lovely faces with their torches, until, just as you were beginning to lose your white complexion, the Goths would come and break off all your fingers, and some villain, bolder than the rest, would knock off your heads to turn 'em into inkstands. Of the Mammoth Cave I am determined to say nothing; and now—It is too good to write about. I spent five days in it, and longed to stay forty. A life would be too short to thread its thousand galleries, and fathom its countless pits. I mean to go to London and get Martin to visit it. It will perhaps set him mad; but he is the only painter worthy

to attempt its awful sublimities.[29] It is like nothing else in the world—nothing else in the world can give you an idea of it. It is delightful and frightful,—glorious and horrible. I think of its fearful abysses, its thrilling solitudes—its crags and chasms,—and my flesh creeps with mingled joy and terror, even while I am thinking of them. I explored you a *new* cavern in this subterranean Labyrinth, and there, afar from the world, in the lovely Fairy Grotto, behind Titania's Fountain, hard by the Maiden's Heart, I inscribed your names; and there they will rest forever. A thunderstorm was roaring at the time in the upper world, but here all was peace and quiet. It was many a weary mile to the entrance of the Cavern—many a hundred, perhaps many a thousand, feet up to the green trees that were falling over our heads. Few profane eyes will look on the fair initials, for few will have resolution and strength to attempt the difficult passage to the Solitary Cave and its Fairy Shrine. Don't you feel proud? I reckon you should.

When shall you see my ugly brown phiz? Sooner than you wish perhaps. I am now only six days' journey from Philadelphia. It makes my heart bounce to think of it. But my star won't let me off so easily. One more—I hope only one more—bothersome excursion I must endure before I tilt off homewards. I start in about a week for Detroit, visiting as many of the old Indian Battle Grounds as I can. From Detroit I must make an excursion to the River Raisin, and a pilgrimage to the grave of Tecumseh. That accomplished, I jump into a steamboat, and make a splash for Niagara, where, I suppose, I will sneeze at the Cataract on the 15th July. Thence I shall—on compulsion, to be sure—pay you a little visit of a week or ten days, and finish the summer by a six weeks' ramble in New England. Then, I visit you again for 2 or 3 weeks, and then—But I can't break your hearts by giving you too much of the doleful future. * * * *

[29] Presumably John Martin (1789-1854), noted painter of landscapes and historical scenes, and of illustrations for the Bible and for *Paradise Lost*.

*The* UNIVERSITY *of* PENNSYLVANIA
LIBRARY CHRONICLE

*Issued four times a year by and for the Friends of the Library of the University*

C. SEYMOUR THOMPSON — EDITOR

# LIFE OF ROBERT MONTGOMERY BIRD

*Written By His Wife, Mary Mayer Bird*

(Fourth Instalment)

Vol 13 No 2 — June 1945

# LIFE OF ROBERT MONTGOMERY BIRD

Written By His Wife, Mary Mayer Bird

Edited From Her Manuscript By C. Seymour Thompson
With Selections From Bird's Correspondence

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## VII. Later Dramas

While on his journey in the South, Dr. Bird was looking forward to a trip to England after the completion of certain works then in hand. These were *The Broker of Bogota,* a tragedy, and *Calavar,* the first "romance of Mexico." Although interrupted in the very commencement by a fit of illness, at these he worked to such good purpose that the manuscript of the latter was in the printer's hands, and "The Broker" a success, before the middle of the following February. While revising for the press, and correcting proof-sheets, he, at the same time, rewrote for Mr. Forrest the tragedy of *Metamora,* which he had the less hesitation in doing, as the plot had been founded upon one of his own unfinished dramas, "King Philip, or The Sagamore." The rewritten *Metamora,* though retaining the name, was, to all intents and purposes, a new play; its plot, construction, incidents, characters, and diction were so totally changed from those of "poor Stone" that no trace of relationship could be observed but in its appellation. In the midst of these severe duties, additional labours claimed every moment that could be spared. It happened that a literary friend had entered into a contract for writing a series of letters from abroad. Time elapsed; after the reception of one or two, no letters were forthcoming; editors and friends all joined in a clamor of abuse. This was more than Dr. Bird could stand. He sat up night after night writing to fill up the gaps of correspondence, and retrieve the character of the absent one—a species of literary forgery as unusual as pardonable. This intense and incessant mental application had a most injurious effect upon his health and spirits, and rendered absolutely necessary the rest and change the prospective sea-voyage was about to furnish.

So overwhelming was the press of work, and so urgent the

haste consequent upon his numerous engagements and Forrest's expected speedy departure for Europe, that Dr. Bird had not time to make a copy of *Metamora* before placing it in Mr. Forrest's hands, but this seemed of less consequence as he anticipated shortly a voyage in the same direction, which would give an opportunity of carrying out the design. In this natural expectation he was doomed to disappointment, as he was never able in England, or after Mr. Forrest's return from abroad, to procure the original draft. This drama, which Dr. Bird thought fully equal to his others, has never been acted.

*The Broker of Bogota* was produced at the Bowery Theatre in New York on February 12, 1834. A hasty note of that date, with Mr. Forrest's signature, contains these words: "I have just left the theatre. Your tragedy was performed and crowned with entire success. 'The Broker of Bogota' will live when our vile trunks are rotten." And a friend who was present at one of the first representations said that there was scarcely a dry eye in the house. Indeed, whenever this piece has been produced (and it has been occasionally, though not often, to the present day), it has been to crowded houses, and with singular effect. And this, in spite of a serious disadvantage to the acting; for the author did not in this, as in Spartacus and Oralloossa, sacrifice everything to the one leading character, but here the interest and attention are divided between two persons of equal importance, the broker Febro and his son Ramon; and the extreme difficulty of having two such characters adequately represented in the same play, has been probably the chief reason why *The Broker of Bogota* has not been oftener brought before the public.

This drama was always the author's favorite work; and justly. With no noise, bustle, or bloodshed, and with little pretension to what commonly constitutes stage-effect, it was singularly successful on the stage; the truth and nature which pervade the play, give beauty and force to every scene, and to the catastrophe an awe and dramatic fitness which is scarcely equalled in *The Gladiator*. It is a mere domestic story,

many incidents of which are common; the date is modern, and the manners not widely different from our own; the positions and feelings of the characters are such as every one can appreciate; the troubles that follow error and crime excite our sympathy, while the moral they teach is driven home with singular power. The struggle in the mind of the old broker between parental tenderness and the fancied duty of severity; the remorse of the outcast Ramon—his better thoughts contending with his pride, and weakly opposing the arguments of the tempter, Cabarero; the complication of his feelings—love, jealousy, ambition, and revenge all driving him to the crime which brings such dreadful retribution; these, and a hundred minor points, show the author's deep knowledge of the human heart. The descriptions, masterly, affecting, and even humorous, which abound; the occasional exquisite touches of nature and pathos, such as Juana's indignant reply to Ramon's charge of inconstancy, and her recall of their childish affection for each other; and above all, the sublimity of the moral lesson which is involved, make this, of all the author's earlier works, the most honorable to his head and heart, and place it prominent among the dramatic works of the present age.

As the occasion, history, and result of Dr. Bird's trans-Atlantic tour are sufficiently set forth in his correspondence, we give below such extracts from it as best answer that purpose, and as are, in themselves, most truly characteristic.

## VIII. In England

The ship *Pocahontas,* Captain West, in which Dr. Bird took passage, set sail for Liverpool the 18th of April. Five days after, he writes:[30]

Wednesday, 23d April, 10 o'clock at night.

We have been detained by calms and head winds until this moment, only about 80 miles below Philad[a]. But the wind has at last changed, the anchor is weighed, the tars are tugging at the canvass, and we hope to reach the Capes by dawn, and get to sea. Our detention has not been without its advantages; had we been at sea, we must have been tossed about, sick, disappointed, and in some fear of drifting ashore; whereas, by lying snugly at anchor in the bay, we have escaped all sickness and danger, and are in great hopes of going out with a long spell of favourable winds. The moon shines nobly and delightfully; and it was quite a magnificent sight to behold the gusts which preceded the change of wind. They were six in number, and swept over us all in the space of twenty minutes, stretching over us in immense bows from E. to W., now hiding, and now disclosing the moon—now coming upon us at a distance with a rushing noise, and now roaring through the rigging as through a winter forest. But I'll skip all description, having too many neighbours scribbling and gabbling at my elbow, to be poetic.

Our cabin company is pleasant, and would be decidedly good, but for Cathrall, or Catcall, or whatever they call him, who is a stupendous ninny, fatal with the flute, dangerous at a fiddle, and mortal in conversation. We are ten in no. and, as I said, quite pleasant. Our captain is a pleasant fellow, and the ship fine.

Give my good words to Mr. and Mrs. Frost.

I have excellent spirits, I assure you. As long as we were detained so far up the river that I could see with a spy glass the steeple of New Castle, and the Highlands of Christeen beyond it, the sight used to make me melancholy; but being now beyond this and on the broadest part of the bay, where we can't see the shores without a glass, I begin to have more cosmopolitan feelings. * * * *

[30] [All of these letters were written to Mary and Caroline Mayer.]

Liverpool, Tuesday, May 13th, 1834.

There is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous—but one jump from America to England—that is, when the wind's fair, and your ship good. The sea is passed, the ship's a-dock—but am I really in the iron isle? How can that be possible? There is something familiar to me in the Broadway flagstones that I have been treading, and methinks there is a spice of Charleston, and other Southern towns, in the dingy and weather-beaten walls of the dwellings of this Johnny Bull town. There are other things "familiar as household gods"—glorious bread and butter, superfine coffee, roast beef, roast mutton, soles, salmons (the two last new acquaintances, but, in a moment, my sworn friends), etc., etc. Who would have thought of such things out of Philad[a]?

But—hard is my fate—I can't expatiate about eatables or sensations just now. Wait till I get me settled in Lunnon town, and then expect the ecstatics: I shall have leisure for such things; *now* I am not yet off my sea legs, and my brain has not stopped shaking. We had a short passage—16 days from land to land, and 22 from city to city (You remember, we left the Capes of Delaware on Thursday the 24th April, 2 o'clock in the morning, I waxing gloriously sick, and others ditto; added to which, a steerage passenger, a poor Bedlamite, was cutting his throat about the same hour). Short passage—quite—Beat the New York packet Virginia which left the day we were leaving Capes, and almost caught the packet of the 16th. Short passage; but oh the squalls! the hurricanes! the rollings about—the pitchings up, and the pitchings down! oh the tumbling this way and that way in berths, instead of sleeping! and oh the seasickness!!! How tired I got of the sea, and all its concerns, in the aforesaid short term of sixteen days, words can't express; and yet there was never a greater variety of sea rarities displayed in so few days, especially in the Spring. The first twelve or thirteen days, it blew in almost incessant gales, which twice waxed into tempests, and once became an absolute hurricane, which was not at all to my liking, though marvellously magnificent. This rage was preluded by a brace of waterspouts, one of which I saw from the forming to the fading thereof, and so near that I could trace the spiral motion of the spray—by a morning rainbow—very rare—and by other such wonders, of which I haven't time to make a page or two of sentiment. All that I have to say of the sea particularly, is that it is an awfully disagreeable place, and that I wish I could get home without recrossing it. *I begin to believe that Providence meant me to stay at home.*

Wednesday morning. Distractions! distractions! distractions! I want to get out of Liverpool tomorrow mg. which throws endless troubles on my hands. If you should ever travel, any of you, never bother yourselves with friends' messages. Think of England having two days of sunshine together! Sunday ent. the Channel in a furious blow—Monday, bright day, with an American sunset; (How I thought of the Schuylkill and the Blind and Lame Hospital, railing, tower, and all!)—Tuesday, landed and ran about all day, looking at clear skies! It is a fact, but Englishmen thought it quite wrong. To-day, clouds, showers, and mud. You ought to hear the sparrows chirping about the eaves, and the capitals of pillars—the town is full of 'em, and they make as much noise as a barn full of swallows in our land—*Our* land! I long to hear the nightingale, but more still the skylark, as doubtless I shall very shortly, on my way to London. I go, via Wales, for variety sake—calculating to reach London by the 20th in time for the Exhibitions. I am vastly pleased with the land so far, and yet immensely tired of it. The men are immensely ugly, and so are the women. I am altogether too much hurried to give you any of my feelings. I only pray heaven to bless you all, and send me back to you in good time. Adieu—adieu—adieu.

R.M.B.

London, No. 3, Adam Street Adelphi—
Monday, May 26th, 1834.

Dear girls,

The quarter of the town in which I have taken rooms is one so peculiarly American, that almost the first individual I discovered in it was my foolish fellow voyager Cathrall, whom with his wife and child, at Liverpool, I had helped ship off to Dublin a week or more ago. In addition, I was roused up the second morning by a street organ grinding out Yankee Doodle; and on the third day, happening from the window to see a man making memorandums in the street, I stared at him, and discovered him to be no more nor less than our lost lambkin, Dr. Black! He is in his senses, in best health, spirits, etc.; says he has written dozens of letters and rec^d^ none. (And this admonishes me to tell you I scribbled you a hasty note from Liverpool, and to request you to direct all your billets doux, without any street or quarter of mine, both of which I may change at any moment, to the care of *John Miller, Esq. Bookseller, 13 Henrietta St. Covent Garden.*) Where was I? Oh, the Doctor—He is in a good humour then, and declares that

none of the women of Philad[a] know how to behave with the manners of good European society, except *yourselves!* especially you, Carry, "who have something naturally very ladylike about you, entirely opposed to the *rowdy* elegance of fashionable vulgarity"!! I stared at the Dr. and asked him if he did not mean somebody else!

London is a splendid—a noble city—and how much I have sometimes scratched my head when remembering some of my ancient conceits about Philadelphia! Pray walk this evening, if the weather be good, to the Squares, and while you are admiring them, fancy, if you can, Parks from five to five hundred times as big, and fifty thousand times more beautiful, with sheets of water, flowering thickets and islands, grassy lawns and knolls, massive clumps of trees and tall groves, with vistas through and over them of ancient Cathedrals, palaces, and monuments. Just fancy, my dear Miss Mary, that you are in a place, where you may indifferently take your stand any where and make four views—right and left, in front and behind, each of which, with the addition of nothing (for effect, figures, etc., are there always ready for you) will make a beautiful picture. Such a place is St. James's Park, and such, they say, are the Regents' and Hyde Park, which I have not yet visited. Their beauties are inconceivable, for the peculiar, smoky atmosphere of this island keeps them always effective. They would be charming places for studies; and, if I can ever learn the use of water colours from the angelic rascals about this town, I mean to spend a week or two in sketching them. *Mem.* I have been in London six days, *and the sun has been shining All the time.* It rained five months last winter; but, they say, fine weather is quite common at this season. My lodging house is within 100 feet of the Thames, my windows look on it; a fine terrace, some 40 or 50 feet above the water, runs along it for about a Square. From this terrace I can see, on the left hand, St. Pauls', on the right, Westminster Abbey; without counting a brace of stone bridges with 12 or 15 huge arches each, or towers and steeples in abundance.

But you want to know what I saw before I got to London. First then I saw the very old walled town of Chester, with its very antique ruined Cathedral, that made me solemn; the winding Dee, that made me think of Mary's Dream; Eaton Hall, a piece of superfluous magnificence and pomp, which kindled my plebeian wrath, and made me more of a republican than ever (you can find descriptions of this place in Carter's Letters, Stewart's recent book, etc.; as for myself, I abhor being too particular); Conway Castle (Wales), a most majestic, im-

pressive, picturesque ruin; the Menai Bridge, a forest of iron; the haggard hills of Wales, all with unpronounceable names, except Snowdon, over whose foot I rode without seeing him, though in broad day; dear, sweet, pretty Llangollen, with the casteilated ruin on the peak—Castel Dinas Bran—and the old Abbey—Valle Crucis—in the gorge hard by; then Shakspeare's den; then the Schoolcotes of Oxford; Windsor Castle, etc., etc., etc., too tedious to mention—till I got to London—which is also too tedious to mention.

The Welsh mountains are rather goodlooking, when one can see them, which is not often, in consequence of the mists; for the land is so foggy, one can't, half the time, see more than half way up a moderate sized tree; and, it is supposed, that nothing but a beggar can ever see up even to the top of a stagecoach.

Of London I have not yet seen much, though kept very busy. I have been to the House of Commons—a most contemptible looking hole; to the Royal Academy (How I could talk about *that,* if I had space and time!)—to divers smaller places; and I have been to hear Paganini! He is really a fine, admirable player—entirely beyond all other fiddlers, but without being at all supernatural or astounding; he is magically excellent, that is all. He played, among other things, a Sonata on the 4th string, wherein was a deep, sorrowful, passionate Adagio, that made me awfully homesick, and then seemed to speak out my heart's thoughts for me. Philadelphia, the walks by the Schuylkill, your own dear selves—all these nonsensical things were lamented in the strain, and lamented as I would lament them, if I could—that is, when I get homesick. Then I came out at 11 o'clock, into a magnificent street composed of two lines of palaces, just as the moon was rising over them. The time set me to thinking on—I made allowance for the difference of longitude, and felt persuaded that, at that moment, you were strolling about the Schuylkill—I got home—I took a peep at the terrace, at the river—it was midnight; at that moment you were watching the sunset. All that night, I dreamed about you and Paganini. The town is full of concerts. By a mistake I missed the other day a Concert of *Hertz,* when Moscheles, Bochsa, etc., were to appear. But they appear almost every day.

I have been too busy yet for business, but will begin soon. You doubtless think I am in a rapture with Lunnon. I am indeed; but nevertheless, I am so well convinced that I should be in raptures still greater at home, that I have more than half persuaded myself that it would be for my interest *to be* at home. I don't see how I can ever

be industrious here; 'tis too noisy, sightseeing a place; and besides, a 5 months rain in the winter! I intend to see if I can't manage to visit you in the fall. Six weeks more would content me with London. But all must depend upon what is pronounced to be necessary.

Give my love to your mother and father, to the girls and all, and believe

Ever yours,

R.M.B.

London, June 25th, 1834.

Dear Children,

After all my modest, unassuming hopes to make a fortune out of the Londoners, they bid very fair to out-Herod Herod, or, what is the same thing, to out-Yankee Yankee. In other words, as I begin to have the comfortable assurance, they will have Calavar from me for nothing, or not have him at all. I hear on all hands how necessary it is that an author should *sacrifice* his first work, especially a foreign one; and I begin to perceive that I must fall into ranks, and do as my betters have done before me. This seems to be a pretty state of things indeed, that an author should *give* a bookseller one book for the privilege of selling him a second: but this is the misfortune of being unknown, as is unfortunately my case. Among the herd of scribblers in Great Britain, notoriety is the only mark of genius for a bookseller; none of these brain merchants will keep a neophyte on pay, while he is creeping up hill. But there is this satisfaction in store, that, after he is up hill, he can make the rascals pay the back account. This is my hope.

The whole state of literature in this enlightened place is such as altogether to amaze, and, for the present, to discourage me. It seems to me certain, that if I personally enter the arena of letters in London, I must expect to do many things, and submit to many, not at all to my mind; and this too without the assurance of any immediate profit. To this I cannot consent; I prefer to follow the plan that Mr. Irving and Mr. Cooper were obliged to adopt—that is, give them a book, and claim pay for the second.

You see that I am disappointed, and that I confess my disappointment. I am mightily mortified and ashamed of having acted so like a goose, as to come to this land on a speculation. So don't tell any body. I intend to leave it without delay. I shan't stay here a moment longer than is necessary to convince me I stay in vain. You need

not be surprised if you see me in Philad^a by the beginning of Sept^r. I begin to talk, and what is more to think, very resolutely of taking passage home by the middle of next month. I can do nothing here: at home, I can work, and pay you such glorious visits! The very thought fills me with transport. There was never any body so homesick in this world! Oh! how homesick I *am!* Though I have heard Paganini again; though at his last concert, *Miss Mayer* acquitted herself very handsomely on the pianoforte; though all day long I hear my dear landlady screaming about among the maids, "You Lucy!" and "You Mary!" (Mem.—Lucy is as ugly as old Nick); though in addition, I see new evidences every day that America is a detestable place, and its institutions odious; though I know our country is a wilderness, and yourselves barbarians, yet, oh murder! oh murder! *how* homesick I am!—Oh how tired I am! I was never more tired of any doghole in all Tennessee, except one (immortal Summersville! be thy name recorded), than I am of the million and a half Monster, London, though the sun shines every day, as in America, and though one day it's hot and one day it's cold, as in Philad^a. In the first place, to account for this eccentric fatigue,—I was meant for a wild man, though not of the gregarious order. From the bottom of my shoe, as well as my heart, I detest a crowd. That ever I should come to ruralize in London! A hidear hunquestionably. Then I detest noises. Oh Niagara! I remember what a fuss thou art making; but I would willingly exchange this rubadub thunder for thy tiresome old dingdong. And the London *Cries!* You should hear them—Cries indeed—lugubrious, heartbreaking—the yells of condemned souls selling cabbages and drumming up for old clothes. They make me nervous. When you get me home, pray don't let me go away again.

I am afraid if I stay here longer, I shall become a Jackson man! I begin to feel like a democrat, and for the first time in my life to think that God will lead the foot of the poor man to the neck of the rich, and that, in this, there will be justice. I can't look about me here, to the right or left, before or behind, to the window above or the gutter at my feet, without seeing an evidence of the corruption and misery that follow in the steps of privilege. If you could but look into some of the wretched hovels which make up the mass of London, or dive into some ancient alley, and witness the degradation and suffering of the creatures that inhabit them; then peep into the nearest palace, and behold the ugly, puny, monkey looking magnificoes who are there dying of ennui, you would wish to be men, your blood would boil, and you

would become reformers, radicals, agitators—that is to say Jackson men, undoubtedly. But all this political indignation of mine comes from my personal dissatisfaction. * * * *

Yrs ever,

R. M. B.

These letters, perhaps more than previous ones, reveal the inner man. Keenly sensitive to mental and bodily good and ill; enthusiastically appreciative of the beautiful in Nature and Art; justly, yet modestly aware of the talents received from his Maker, and trusting in child-like simplicity in the world's readiness to do them justice; but, disappointed and rebuffed, confessing his vanity (if, indeed, it were vanity) and, with manly frankness, attributing his unfavorable opinions and severe judgments to private pique and mortification.

A circumstance occurred, just before leaving England, that brought into play another trait, perhaps still more strongly marked. And this, by the way, was one of similar incidents, not revealed in letters or friendly converse, but lighted on by accident. A friend and brother American he found, who had fallen into great difficulties—in fact, into such immediate necessity, as danger of imprisonment for debt, if not actual confinement in jail. Dr. Bird sat down, reckoned the minimum amount requisite to carry him to Philadelphia (excluding his passage-money, which his brother would not receive),[31] relinquished the gratification of some rare purchases for the loved ones there, and emptying the balance into the hands of his disconsolate countryman, arrived home, literally penniless, after paying his last shilling to the boy who carried his trunk from the wharf.

[31] [A brother of Dr. Bird was captain of the ship in which he returned from England.]

## IX. The Romances

Dr. Bird's Mexican romances were written, after all, without the visual investigation and ocular proof, so long and ardently desired, but it is scarcely doubtful whether they have suffered on the score of accuracy of description or of fact, from this want. Those who knew their author were well aware that he had amassed an amount of knowledge and materials in relation to the subject, sufficient, certainly, for half a dozen novels and, probably, for the history he contemplated as an after-labour. They therefore urged against his project the perils of the undertaking as more than equivalent to the satisfaction of a personal examination, and to these views, enforced by unexpected obstacles, he reluctantly resigned himself. In this case, the overruling desire to increase and verify knowledge had actually put down, if it could not conquer, the warm and undying love of home—that instinct that breaks forth in such piteous, sometimes such humorous, lamentations in his letters.

Once fairly started, it is certain he had all the matter at his finger-ends, and wrote *currente calamo.* Daily tasks were set, and so correct were his calculations, both as to time and space, that the allotted period found the work on *Calavar* accomplished, and the printed matter coincided within a page or two of his computations. Although stereotyped and corrected before he sailed for England, it was not the intention to publish it until the autumn.

In the October following his return from England, *Calavar, or, The Knight of the Conquest,* was published by Messrs. Carey and Lea. This well-known and enterprising firm subsequently brought out all his after works, except one published anonymously. Although he had failed to make any arrangements with the London booksellers, the work was almost immediately republished by Bentley, who also took the liberty

of changing its name. Four handsomely printed volumes, under the title *Abdalla, the Moor,* were the only acknowledgment of his claims the author ever received from the English publisher. *Calavar* went through several editions, was republished in a cheap form during the period of the Mexican war, and again, in one neat volume, by Redfield, shortly after the author's death. It has also been translated into German.

In the succeeding winter, while Dr. Bird was engaged upon his second Mexican romance, a short but exceedingly interesting correspondence occurred between him and Mr. Powers, the sculptor. The latter had just arrived at Washington, and was there winning golden opinions by his successful efforts. These letters, as recalling some of his most pleasing associations, were always preserved with jealous care. Among the poems thrown off at this time was "The Old Sycamore." This ode, "which aspires only to do honour to an old sycamore, of uncommon altitude, on the banks of the Ohio, near to Cincinnati," was composed for a celebration of the forty-seventh anniversary of the landing at the mouth of the Muskingum for the settlement of Ohio. In acknowledgment of the very cordial invitation to be present on this occasion, Dr. Bird furnished this beautiful poem.

In the beginning of May, 1835, Dr. Bird's publishers gave to the world *The Infidel, or, The Fall of Mexico.* The following letter to James Lawson contains an allusion to this story, and expresses his views as to fictitious narrative:[32]

You are wrong, I think, concerning the necessity of eternal "action" in a novel, as in a play. The deepest interest can be drawn from the picture of poor, inert, helpless devils, overwhelmed by fate, and sinking passively into the gulf. Such is found in *The Bride of Lammermoor,* where the heroine is wax, and the hero lead, sand, clay, water—any thing. Yet that fiction, if you will take my word for it, is the most interesting and deeply affecting ever penned by the hand of man. The actors do *nothing;* but how our tears drop over them! nay, over their

[32] [Two unfinished drafts of this letter have been preserved. The passage concerning fiction is printed from one—probably the final—draft in Foust, *Life and Dramatic Works of Robert Montgomery Bird,* 87-88. We print the passage here from the other draft.]

memory! Nothing in the whole varied range of literature takes such hold of my imagination and feelings as that little story; and yet after all, it is wholly without action. However, *The Bride of Lammermoor* was written by Walter Scott; and we little fiddle-de-dees, his children, must cut our coat according to *our* cloth, not his. In the thing I am fabricating now (I am squinting towards the end of the first vol.) I intend to be tumultuous and fierce, with at least one roaring piece of the "big figure" that shall take your hair off. If I know *what action is* (of which I am not altogether certain) I can assure you it is easier to fill a book with it, than with quiet and contemplative scenes and descriptions.[33] But I abhor the eternal intoxication and crash of swearing and knocking down, as much as I do the eternal grunt of the bassoon, trump, and trombone in an opera.

While occupied with correcting proof sheets of *The Infidel,* Dr. Bird was again deep in another novel. Leaving the classic ground of Mexico, he now chose as the scene of his story the vicinity of one of the most beautiful spots in our own land. Of *The Hawks of Hawk Hollow* he thus speaks in the Introduction: " * * * * Of some of the pebbles that we have picked up along the banks of the Delaware, the following story has been constructed. - - - - The story, such as it is, is rather a domestic tale, treating of incidents and characters common to the whole world, than one of which these components can be considered *peculiarly* American." Nevertheless, this tale bears sufficiently on some of the latter incidents of our Revolutionary struggle, to be classed with legends of that period. Its object not being chiefly to illustrate history or manners, it bears some analogy to *The Broker of Bogota.* These two were, in fact, of all his works the author's favorites, and breathed more truly his spirit and temper. It was published about the middle of September, 1835.

[33] [This reminds one of Scott's comment on Jane Austen *(Journal of Sir Walter Scott,* New York, 1890, 1:155): "The Big Bow-wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch, which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me."]

The sedentary habits engendered by incessant application, and the long-continued mental tension, combined with anxious thoughts as to the future, which now began to disturb him, seriously affected his health, and loudly urged the necessity of a temporary change. He therefore seized upon this as a proper occasion of carrying out his plan of exploring the Great Mammoth Cave, and other portions of Kentucky on which he had designs. Leaving home in the middle of September, he crossed the mountains of Virginia, visiting Weyer's Cave and the springs on the route; was enraptured with the scenery and sickened by the sulphur waters; and from Guandotte, records himself as being "in the only Christian tavern I have seen since I left Washington," and delighted with the prospect of "a room with but one bed in it (I slept last night in one that had fourteen!)". He continues:

But oh that you could see the Western forests, now beginning to put on the livery of Autumn. *We* have splendid colours in our woods at home, but by no means in such profusion, nor indeed in such variety, as they have here. The common maples form the fine yellows, the silver maples a glorious lilac, and the sugar-trees the most resplendent sunset-orange ever imagined. The gums are perfect crimson, some of the small oaks fine purple. Thousands of trees are covered—that is, their stems—with poison-oak, all purple and flame, so that a fine white-oak, elm, or tulip tree sometimes looks as if its green branches sprang out of a pillar of fire.

From Lexington, where he arrived a few days later, he writes:

"I will be gone two or three months or so," quoth I. Och! what fools people are, when they are at home, talking of the length of intended journeys! Two or three months is but a small time *at* home, but two or three months *away* is another matter. Give me, hereafter, when I go travelling, two or three days—which is long enough to be homesick. - - - - I am tired of my expedition already; and, in truth, I have been scheming, ever since I took the long look, eastward, from the Warm-Spring mountain, and then found myself shut out from the bonny Atlantic altogether, how I might shorten it to the best advantage.

When I got ashore at Maysville, - - - - I found, upon my right hand, the Ohio, with divers steamboats paddling up and down; on my left, a fine macadamized road, leading towards the Mammoth Cave. Now, if you'll believe me, while I was walking towards the stage-office of the aforesaid macadamized road, I had certain notions in my mind concerning the expediency of mistaking my way, and stumbling into a Pittsburg steamer. But shame forbade, and I marched to the stage-office. I arrived in Lexington, and here I am spending the third mortal day, resisting my treacherous propensity at backsliding as before. I will go on to-morrow morning; but I have found a way to shorten my exile. I will, in the first place, go no further than the Cave, and, in the second, I will stay there no longer than I can avoid. I will leave it, if possible, by the 15th October, and *then,* if nothing happens, how rapidly will I labour to return! Oh you dear souls, Kentucky is an agreeable place, but Philadelphia is much better. My present notion is, to go (after leaving the Cave) to Louisville, thence to Pittsburg, and thence by stage, canal, and railroad together (for variety's sake) to Philadelphia. * * * *

I have remained here somewhat longer (3 days) than I like; but can't help it, the stage that runs from Lexington to Nashville plying only three times a week. Monday was the day I designed to go; but I had a cold, the weather was squally, and there was a poor fellow of a Louisiana judge anxious to get on; so I looked out on the weather and in on my blazing fire, and very magnanimously and generously gave him my seat for five dollars and a half, being the amount I paid for it. However, it didn't rain at all; however, I'm not sorry I stayed, for I really had a sneezing time of it all day yesterday; and however, to conclude, I consider myself convalescent enough to travel to-morrow, as I should have done to-day, had the stage been running.

It has been a happy circumstance for me, so far, that I have always had my proper rest, all the coaches I have been in, stopping at night. This is the case with the line I go in to-morrow; which is agreeable, the road being none of the smoothest in the world, and sleeping at night in a stage being a higgledy-piggledy thing at best.

Give my love to all the dear souls at home, and to Mrs. Frost and Co., and record me

Ever yours,

R. M. B.

The next letter exhibits humourously the ease with which Dr. Bird adapted himself to all sorts of people and circumstances.

Three Forks, Barren County, Kentucky
Tuesday, 6th October, 1835.

I am now, and have been since Friday last, at what is called the "best tavern in Kentucky," listening to the piping of the winds through a broken window on my right hand, and, on my left, to the snores—no, he don't snore—to the drowsy sighs of Johnny Grimes, napping off the fatigues of a midnight ride, which he concluded by reaching the rendezvous this morning before day. With such a friend at my side, you may suppose I am in good hands, although in the "best tavern in Kentuck." We are within 7 miles of the Cave, whither we expect to proceed to-morrow, provided the weather be favourable—a matter to be doubted, as it has been raining for the last two or three days, and is still squally. However, I can bear another day's detention pretty well, having Johnny Grimes to talk to.

In my letter from Lexington to Carry, I mentioned having a cold. It grew to be something of a sneezer, and *rifled* (Kentuckice, ruffled) my equanimity a good deal; but it is now almost cured, and I consider myself well. I have a fine appetite, and eat three times a day in a way that astonishes myself.

You should see me at the table, or in the public room, of this "best tavern in all Kentuck," with the guests that frequent it, who are drawn principally from the respectable ranks of stage-drivers, waggoners, and travelling clodhoppers in woolsey coats and leather leggings, a set of tatterdemalions who are all gentlemen, though as the Volscian scullion said of Coriolanus, "marvellous poor ones." Oh, democracy! oh, Liberty and equality! we don't understand the terms in Philadelphia. The first supper I sat down to was in company with one waggoner and three stage-drivers, all exquisites of Kentucky chop, out at elbows and knees, with unwashed faces and mud-coloured hands, among whom I, unworthy that I am, looked, though in my seediest clothes, like Hyperion among satyrs; nevertheless, every raggamuffin was *helped first,* and I very properly neglected, as I was nothing more than a gentleman. However, this put me on my good behaviour; I made love to the rascals, lit my pipe (my pipe!! ay, on my word, stuffed full of Kinniconick—that is, sumach leaves), puffed and sputtered, talked big and Crocketish, told all the grand stories I could invent to their capacities, and was

considered a rowdy of inestimable worth and agreeableness. Mine host opened his eyes and hugged me, the waggoner clapped me on the shoulder; and the drivers asked me to drink. Never was such a conquest achieved over hearts by maid or widow. The tavern-keeper expressed his affection by making me a fire and (uncommon stretch of affection) giving me a three-bedded room all to myself, the drivers all hoped I would go in their coaches, and ride on the box with them, and the waggoner, having discovered that he had kept his eyes open, and neglected to feed his horses, up to the extraordinary hour of half past 9, swore "he'd not stir, for his beasts or his betters, unless I would promise not to go to bed till he came back." Never, I say, was such a conquest made. I don't know what became of my stage-drivers next morning; but when the waggoner went his ways, it was with tears in his eyes. "Fare-well, partner," said he (*stranger* is now exploded as unfashionable and almost inelegant: *partner* is all the, and the only, go); "Fare-well, partner," said he, cracking his whip in a melancholy manner; "I can't barr to part with you; you're a feller for a man, I go my death on it; Fare-well." As for mine host, his love has not decreased; and never was traveller so petted in a Kentucky tavern since Kentucky gentlemen set up trade on the way-side. * * * *

Armed at all points with drawing and surveying instruments and other necessaries, Dr. Bird and his friend Grimes explored the Mammoth to their hearts' content, going, as the guides declared, full three miles further than any previous traveller, discovering new beauties and wonders, and enriching their portfolios with many drawings, besides accomplishing as much in the way of scientific investigation as was possible under the circumstances. Dr. Bird, on his return, gave the most graphic and detailed account of that most wonderful of Nature's works, which account was afterwards published with other papers in *Peter Pilgrim.* In the majestic halls and gloomy winding galleries of "the dear old Mammoth," his former enthusiasm was rekindled, and gave rise to the conception of a grand epic poem, to commemorate, among other things, the sublimities of this greatest of Nature's wonders. This was the origin of "The Cave," a labour of love, and the favorite relaxation of moments stolen from his daily tasks. It is a matter of regret that he was unable, from the pressure

of illness and severe duties, to complete a work, so happily commenced, abounding in elevation, vigour, pathos, and beautiful description—in fact, combining all the elements of the highest poetry. Nor remain there notes or intimations of its further plan; all that was hidden in his brain; only the casual and vague hints to one or two in his confidence, lead to the idea, that "The Wanderer" was, at length, to be revived and cheered by a fair vision pointing to a brighter future, leading him upwards with holier hopes.[34]

In the summer of 1836 he placed in the hands of the Messrs. Harper, New York, *Sheppard Lee,* to be published by them anonymously. This work, coming unheralded from the press, without adoption of the usual means for promoting circulation, failed of the success it deserved. In subject, treatment, style, in all respects, widely different from the author's previous works, its quiet humour, well-directed satire, and evident truth and naturalness, found for it warm admirers among the very few into whose hands it fell, some of whom shrewdly suspected its origin; while others, less aware of the wondrous versatility of genius, declared it impossible *Sheppard Lee* should have been written by the author of Spartacus, Calavar, or the Hawks. Its home-thrusts—good-humoured, yet so numerous and forcible—struck right and left; and many an honest citizen, of whom its author had never heard, fancied he saw himself or neighbour in one of the numerous personages into which Sheppard Lee was transformed. Yet is the satire of the most amiable sort, and the moral—contentment with the lot assigned by Heaven—however humble—admir-

[34] ["The Cave" is an allegorical poem, of which only four cantos were completed. The manuscript of these is among Dr. Bird's papers. The theme, in the words of Bird's son, the Rev. Frederic Mayer Bird, is the "national aspects and prospects, possibilities and dangers," of America: "patriotic hopes and fears, gratulations and warnings; looks cast before and after, and guesses at the Future by the light of the Past; descriptions of American scenery, moralisings on the fate of nations, and predictions—or something very like it—of the Civil War." "Had the whole plan been carried out," wrote Mr. Bird, "the result might have been the most important of my father's works, and his best title to remembrance."]

ably enforced. Among other novelties with which this work abounds, is one that deserves a notice: this is a prophetic intimation of the Daguerrean discovery—a favorite idea of his, that the reflection should be fastened down on the mirror, and there remain imperishable. Although delivered in the imperfect jargon of a German quack professor, the idea is there, plain enough, and this, several years before this wonderful process was made known to the world by the discoveries of Daguerre and others. Altogether, *Sheppard Lee,* if known, could not fail to raise the reputation of its author.

Although Dr. Bird's plays met with no favor in England, the double dose of an American author and American actor being probably too much for John Bull to swallow, his fellow-dramatists there paid him the compliment of enrolling him member of their Society; and although English booksellers printed and sold his works, and paid him the tribute of—a copy—(why should they more, when there was no law to hinder their having them for nothing?)—English authors were not unwilling to avail themselves of his aid in their efforts to secure that protection to their property of which the fraternity, on both sides of the Atlantic, have been, hitherto, so unjustly deprived.

The next work produced by Dr. Bird has been the most widely spread of his narratives, and the most appreciated. *Nick of the Woods* has been read by thousands who never opened the leaves of *Calavar* or *The Infidel.* Although damaged greatly in success, as were the previous works, by the unfortunate financial revulsion of the time, it became at once popular, and maintains its ground to the present day.[35] It has been dramatized, and translated into German, in which form, it has been said, more than 10,000 copies have been sold. Five years ago it was stereotyped by Mr. Redfield, of

[35] [The story was republished in 1939, edited by Cecil B. Williams, who says it had previously "had almost thirty editions, including one in Polish, one in Dutch, and four in German." Williams says, further: "In its author's time, at least two dramatic versions helped keep it before the public, and as recently as 1883, Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi* could refer to the Jibbenainosay as a character ostensibly known to all educated persons."]

New York, and published in one neat volume.

The origin of *Nick of the Woods,* like that of most of its predecessors, dates back to Dr. Bird's early manhood. This "legend of the dark and bloody ground" was derived from his Kentucky friend, Dr. Black, in their days of close companionship. Related by him, one fine afternoon, as the two, in company with Grimes, were strolling on the banks of romantic Wissahickon, it so completely took possession of Dr. Bird that he could think of nothing else, nor rest, until he had plotted out the whole romance. In one, or perhaps two, of his visits to the West, he personally inspected the ground, and wrote out the story in the winter of 1836-'37. It was published in March of the latter year.

Abuse or critical remarks on his works Dr. Bird generally took in great good-humour, but one attack on *Nick of the Woods* affected him strongly. This was an accusation of hostility or willingness to hurt the feelings of a class or sect, whom none, more than he, held in esteem and reverence. Certain observations in the Introduction to the later editions of this work were made with reference to this attack.

Meantime, how did the author live? Were his hopes realized?—the golden dreams of his friends—those who, in zeal and affection, rejoiced at having aided to secure "Bird's fortune"? *The Gladiator,* played 1000 times during the life of its author, and to crowded houses, must surely have made a princely fortune—but it, as surely, was not Dr. Bird's. Some mistake there was, somewhere. However it might be, Dr. Bird's books, scrupulously kept, show continually reduced personal expenses, and various ingenious plans and computations promotive of general retrenchment. Dearer hopes, deferred again and again, were now the incentive to exertion, as the wish for more liberal and generous means had been for the sake of another, rather than himself. Literature he still believed in, as a "staff" to lean on, and was willing yet to trust her for a reward; and when the fallacy of that "fortune," thought so secure, became a fact, and it was plain his sole dependence rested on his continued labours, his spirit,

though it suffered, did not forsake him.

*Peter Pilgrim* and *Robin Day* were the last works published, of any extent. In the latter, as has been mentioned, he embodied a good deal of his own youthful experience at school. Long before the publication of these two works his health was evidently giving way. *Peter Pilgrim* was arranged and revised under the disadvantages of an enfeebled frame, and *Robin Day* was undertaken, carried on, and finished, under the pressure of physical suffering. Pale, emaciated, a victim to the most aggravated form of dyspepsia, nearly blind for weeks in consequence of this disorder, his family and friends, seriously alarmed, renewed more strenuously than ever their oft-repeated solicitations to him to make an entire change in his mode of life. Sensible himself of the precariousness of his condition, prompted to greater regard for health by the new ties of wife and child,[36] actuated moreover by sundry grave doubts as to the adequacy of an author's profits to the support of a family, he finally determined to abandon literature as a business, and seek, in the pursuits of agriculture, that rest and renovation that were absolutely essential.

[36] [Bird and Mary Mayer were married July 13, 1837. Their son, Frederic Mayer, was born June 28, 1838.]

*The* UNIVERSITY *of* PENNSYLVANIA
LIBRARY CHRONICLE

*Issued four times a year by and for the Friends of the Library of the University*

C. SEYMOUR THOMPSON — EDITOR

# LIFE OF ROBERT MONTGOMERY BIRD

*Written By His Wife, Mary Mayer Bird*

(Fifth Instalment)

Vol 13 No 3 — September 1945

# LIFE OF ROBERT MONTGOMERY BIRD

WRITTEN BY HIS WIFE, MARY MAYER BIRD

EDITED FROM HER MANUSCRIPT BY C. SEYMOUR THOMPSON
WITH SELECTIONS FROM BIRD'S CORRESPONDENCE

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Mary Mayer Bird

From Water-color Painting

Date Unknown

## X. In Retirement

It has been an occasion of wonder to many, and has, perhaps, suggested the charge of instability and fickleness, that Dr. Bird, in the very height of his success, voluntarily relinquished his profession, and was content to sink into the obscurity or nonentity of a country gentleman. But rest was indispensable; his brain was overtasked, his eye-sight failing, and the change probably saved his life. Influenced alike by economy and an eye to the picturesque, he purchased a farm of the rich but worn-out land in Bohemia Neck, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, situated on the Elk, about seven miles below Elkton. Hither it was his intention to remove early in the spring of 1839, but, prevented by difficulties with his tenant from immediate possession, he was enabled by the fortunate accident of a vacant house, belonging to his brother, in New Castle, to secure a temporary abode in the home of his early years.

Powerful must have been his emotions in bidding adieu to the fair city, consecrated to him by so many and varied bonds! The scene of his highest aspirations, his greatest labours, his brilliant success! Dear to him too as the home of valued friends. It would be an agreeable task to particularize those with whom intercourse had remained always pleasant and confidential, but perhaps delicacy forbids. It is allowable, however, to recur to business relations, and it was always a pleasure to Dr. Bird to repeat that, from his publishers, Carey & Lea, subsequently Lea & Blanchard, he had received only kindness and courtesy—that the mutual confidence and accommodating spirit that subsisted between them was never marred by misunderstanding—that with them he had to do with gentlemen in the truest sense of the word.

In the last two years of residence in Philadelphia he was

called to mourn the loss of several of his dearest friends. The untimely death of his brother-in-law, a young man of uncommon promise, occurring but a few weeks after his marriage, was followed, before many months, by that of his early artist friend, Grimes, and soon after by the removal of his last cousin, Dorcas, who had been as a sister, and a rare specimen of womanly purity, refinement, and piety.

March, 1839, witnessed the removal of the family to New Castle. The house they were to occupy, pleasantly situated on the verge of the village, afforded a sight of green fields, thorn-hedges, and distant woods, not to mention a glimpse of the river, and a fine western opening to show the glories of the sunset. Pure, fresh air was there in abundance, and sometimes a sea-breeze. It was a glorious place to rest in, to recruit life's worn-out energies. Gratefully does the memory of the dear old town's repose steal over the heart. Yielding himself to it, Dr. Bird became what he called lazy; indulged himself in long tramps with his wife, seeking the old boyish haunts, in reading, in inventing agricultural machines, amassing agricultural and horticultural lore from all quarters, planning all sorts of charming rural cottages, making all sorts of experiments on sun-dried bricks and water-proof cements and new processes of wall-colouring, and, in an infinite variety of ways, preparing for the life of a clod-hopper. With heart and soul he entered into these new occupations. His farm-books, his port-folios full of plans of ploughs and mowing-machines, of threshing-machines and straw-cutters, and I wot not what else, do not betoken a waste of time. The work of improvement was going on, and the expiration of the year's rest and recreation found him strengthened for the more active duties of his farm. To that haven of rest, after various detentions and mishaps, his goods and chattels, and family in part, arrived about the middle of March, 1840.

Arrived at the "Birds' Nest,"[37] in the midst of a dreary

[37] [A name by which Bird frequently referred to his farm when dating his letters.]

equinoctial, the scene presented was not the most encouraging. The lands, still bearing the marks of winter's fierce reign, and of the more remorseless destructiveness and neglect of man, did not look more cheerless than the lowly dwelling, which gave evidence of the utmost carelessness and shameful abuse. The unprincipled tenant, whom Dr. Bird's clemency had, the previous year, spared from a forcible ejectment, seemed to have exerted his powers of mischief to injure, as much as possible, the property of which he could no longer retain possession. Fences were down, by miles, to the great and manifest delight of half the cattle of the manor, who, in droves, sought, as is their wont, the best pasturage. Similar was the condition of the out-houses, and the spare chambers of the dwelling had been converted into corn-cribs, producing an unusual development of rats and mice. A Herculean task was imminent. The Augean stables were a circumstance compared with these new labours. But these troubles were not unexpected, and with indomitable energy and perseverance did Dr. Bird meet them. And what cannot energetic industry and good taste accomplish? With the inefficient aid of country carpenters and masons, he soon put the house into decent order. His mechanical dexterity was brought into requisition to do a thousand things that the unskillfulness or laziness of the workmen would never have permitted them to accomplish. From an extract or two from a letter to his wife, whom, with considerate kindness, in spite of her unwillingness, he had settled with her infant charge in the city till this scene of bustle and turmoil was ended, may be gathered an idea of his occupations. The letter is dated from "Bendico (*quasi* Bending Cove), *alias* Cabin Cove."

I sit down to write with pain and anguish—not because I have any doleful news to relate, but because my fingers are so bruised and blistered that even the innocent pen feels uncomfortable in its ancient place. So much for the pleasures of the country. But, of a verity, there is much hard work to be done, and much of it that must be done with my own hands. I have not yet attempted the plough, or cracked

the cart-whip; but I have digged and hewn, hammered doors and glazed windows, mended locks and fences, and played the general factotum from half past four in the morning till half past eight at night; and still the work grows upon my hands. You will see, from this, it is quite impossible I should write you a long letter detailing our bothers and mishaps, our contrivances and cunning inventions. All these you shall have at length, when we get together on the scene of action. * * * * And now to allay your raging curiosity concerning the farm—and first, the cabin. It is old, ugly, inconvenient, and shockingly out of repair, and mightily wanting in verge and room enough. But it is rain-tight, as we find by last night and to-day, and we are improving and mending as well and fast as we can, and stowing things to make more elbow-room. I rely upon your philosophy to take things as patiently as you can, until we can have a better and bigger house, with the comforts and conveniences civilization takes note of. The house is a cabin; but lest you should be alarmed, know it is as good as—and rather better than—most other houses in the Manor; and a little paint and whitewash will make it endurable for a while.

In another letter, to an intimate friend, a fortnight later, he says:

I don't know whether you write to me or not, the mails in this part of the world being as incomprehensible as in other places; but I take it for granted, from your known benevolence, you will occasionally send me a ray of intelligence and friendship, in my out-of-the-world nook, down here in Bohemia Neck; where I am clodhopping in perfection, living upon fish and bacon, and tracing daily in myself the transformation from a gentleman and cockney to a boor and vulgarian. I live in a small house, and a confounded bad one; but I hope, some time or other, to make it bigger and better. I, however, enjoy its situation, upon the banks of a beautiful river, with sandy shores and clear water, full of vessels, and, now, of fishermen, who are pulling and singing their boat-songs all day and night—in sight of Frenchtown on the one hand, and the Chesapeake on the other, and but 3 miles from the steam-boat landing below; the steamers pass each other at ½ past 10 a. m., generally, right before our doors. * * * *

A month or six weeks' hard work sometimes does wonders, and so does a cheerful, accommodating spirit. As the spring brought out the beauties of the landscape, the hand of industry

removed the marks of disorder and unseemliness. The straggling worm-fences, stretching around the numerous graceful bends of the river, and back from it, on the boundaries and lane, to the main road that bisected the peninsula, excluded the invading herds, that had been growing fat at our expense,—partially, at least, for ever and anon a leader, more powerful in horns and shoulders than his companions, would quietly lift the bars, and make a way for the rest. The fields were ploughed and sown, and from them abundantly was stone collected for the foundations and walls of the house that was to be; the gardens were made, and began to put forth kind promise of early vegetables, fruits, and flowers; even our temporary abode, the lowly cabin, under the magical influence of soap and lime, paint and putty, its vase of wild flowers, and plain but neat furniture within, its overspreading, shining coat without, shaded by a few trees, and adorned by the fast-growing vines that were already climbing the rustic porch that owned the master's handy-work, began to wear a most bewitching aspect. And when the household, at last reunited, gazed, at evening, on the glowing sunset, reflected on the bosom of the broad river, from beneath the impenetrable shelter of their venerable grape-vines which, for at least a hundred years, had been stretching out and twining closer and closer their branches, until they formed a wide and impervious arbour the whole length of the house, they began to fancy it a sort of humble paradise.

City habits underwent as great a transmutation as city ideas. What would they have thought, a year before, of rising with the dawn, breakfasting at six, dining at one, and going to bed at nine? Of making their dinner of eggs, vegetables, and fruit? (for soon was the bacon banished from the table, and fish every day was too much of a good thing). Of living in the open air, and there busy, working hard, the greater part of the time? All seemed to thrive under the new regime, and never did Dr. Bird look or feel so well. His complexion became florid like an Englishman's, his appetite

was admirable, his strength was wonderful; he forgot his quinsies and dyspepsia, and slept like a top from the moment his head touched the pillow. For lack of a better, he made his workshop on the shady side of the house, and there, with his carpenter's bench and tools, did he in leisure hours effect many a useful contrivance, supply many a want. He was unremitting in his observation and direction of farm duties, and was soon able, if need were, by turning his hand to the plough, or any other implement, to set a good example or enforce obedience.

His fame spread abroad. The farm became the admiration of the neighbourhood. Men and women came, the former to wonder how a city gentleman could have raised such promising crops; the women to witness, with their own eyes, the innovation of a milk-house, dug deep and sodded over; and both, to stare in stupid astonishment at the glories of our furniture! What blessed ignorance of sideboards, carpets, book-shelves, and such luxuries! Most of these people—the natives, I mean, not, of course, the two or three families who, like ourselves, had emigrated from a city—owned their hundred of acres, and, in some instances, slaves, besides; yet were they content to live in a style not much superior to that of Irish bog-trotters. Their domestic arrangements were of the most primitive kind; witness the movable dairy of shelves, changed from side to side of the house, often in vain search of the shade the low building so scantily afforded. If one side of the house tumbled down, they removed to the other; how could they help it?—it was not their doing. They were philosophic, and went on the principle let well enough (or bad enough) alone. The words of the wise man, "I went by the field of the slothful," etc., always recurred to my mind in passing their abodes. The spinster—boasting an ancient and honoured name, too—of whom we hired two of our hands, could neither read nor write. In these respects her intelligent slaves had the advantage of her. Yet was she most kind and tender of them, called them "my children," and kept them neatly and comfortably clad in the work of her own hands.

Those whose happy destiny has placed them north of Mason's and Dixon's line could, perhaps, scarcely realize that such ignorance and stupidity existed so near their borders; but such was the fact sixteen years ago, tho' now, I believe, a far better population has supplanted, or at least shed its civilizing influence over the natives.

If the popular superstition, that he who kills a snake conquers his enemy, holds true, then would Dr. Bird have been invincible. Numerous triumphs in this line had already gained him a reputation with the darkies, and, although he could not, even had he wished it, disperse the whippoor-wills that, at even-tide, soothed us with their melancholy notes, yet if a stray owl alighted on a neighbouring tree he never failed to put it to flight before its boding notes were heard, or its uncouth form seen on the house-top. He was considered lucky. This was the more desirable, as it tended to counteract the effects produced on their minds by the breaking of a mirror, which Chanticleer, with more freedom than propriety, had one day attacked, upon being filled with indignation at the unwonted sight of his own reflected image. This ominous event required a succession of favorable auguries to efface it from their minds. Dr. Bird's battle with the black snake capped the climax of his successes. Every now and then, rumours had reached our ears of a terrific serpent of fabulous proportions that, from time immemorial, had infested the banks of a certain rivulet, running through a marshy meadow, overgrown with weeds and bushes. Incredible stories were told of his belligerent propensities and unconquerable prowess. Wo to the unhappy wretch that was fool-hardy enough to invade his premises. Did he live to tell the tale, he was so wounded, battered, and miserably abused, that no inducements could have tempted him again to face such dangers. His victims were countless. By degrees the panic became so universal that, by common consent, the territory was yielded entirely to the enemy, and his highness became literally lord of all he surveyed. None of the neighbours would ever be caught in

its precincts, and our darkies, spite of their lazy proclivities, preferred a round-about of several miles to the short cut it afforded to the negro village.

Dr. Bird laughed at the tale as apocryphal, and took especial delight in selecting that route in his walks over the farm. But one day, going the rounds, with gun on shoulder, as was his wont, if perchance he might secure a tit-bit for his little rogue at home, he was suddenly startled and brought to a stand-still by the apparition of a huge serpent, not a yard ahead of him, erect and full six feet long, that made unmistakable demonstrations of bold defiance and immediate assault. Stepping back to secure a good position for the conflict, Dr. Bird unfortunately struck his foot against a projecting root and sprained his ankle severely, causing most violent pain. Disregarding the anguish, with the butt-end of his gun he aimed a deadly blow at his assailant's head, which despatched him forthwith. With this trophy of victory in one hand, and gun in the other, he limped with pain and difficulty his mile of way home. It need not be said that the snake's carcass was the object of visits, inspection, and admiration, and of much rejoicing with the rude population.

Summer came on apace. The noble chesnuts on the hillside shone in the glory of their rich blossoms; and the ever-tender green of liquid-ambers growing on the verge of the wood was relieved by the deeper hue of adjacent forest-trees. All nature looked smiling, and the land was full of promise. Already were we reaping the reward of our labour in the fruits and vegetables that our hands had planted, and that the propitious clime and favorable soil yielded full a fortnight earlier than in even the famed gardens of the Neck. On the 16th of June, Dr. Bird remarked that some of his corn stalks were higher than his shoulder, and that his crops were called the finest in the country. The day—well do I remember it!—was sombre and gloomy, but most welcome to our eyes as offering, after a two weeks' drought, bright hopes of future good from its impending showers. How busy were all hands

in preparing for the expected blessing—in transplanting the tender herbs that waited with longing the propitious hour—in care for the cattle—in all other out-door arrangements. No where is the immediate superintendence of Providence so felt as on a farm. Showers and sunshine tell a different tale there from what they do in town. Gradually the storm came on. About two hours after noon we were sensible of a change, a mysterious, portentous something that filled us with indescribable dread. The blackness had increased. A heavy, suffocating atmosphere oppressed our breathing—a frightful stillness reigned—and, lost in awe, we watched the visible approach of the hurricane, that advanced across the river like a huge, solid, black wall.

In a moment it was upon us, in the combined fury of hail, rain, and wind. At the first stroke, every pane was shivered, and the elements swept through the upper story, unprotected by shutters, down in a deluge through the ceiling upon the rooms below. In another moment, torrents were thundering along both sides of the house, ruthlessly bearing uprooted trees and fences in their course. For two hours, we expected the house to go. Without foundations, erected on piles, in the ancient fashion of that uncivilized region, how did it withstand the tremendous forces that waged war upon it? Probably its non-resistance saved it. The tempest swept unbridled through its upper chambers, and was satisfied. At all events, Providence was merciful in sparing the roof over our heads. The tornado lasted but two hours, but till midnight the rain fell in torrents. Spite of that, arrayed in over-coat and storm-boots, Dr. Bird started out with his two men, to repair, in some measure, the damage. Six hours' incessant labour retrieved some of the mischief. A mile of prostrate fence was restored to some degree of usefulness, and out-houses to their proper position.

The ensuing day looked with mocking brilliancy on a sad spectacle. Where was our glorious old arbour—our vine-tree porch? Well might we ask, for not a leaf, nor a trace of

one, remained to cover the bare branches, that, undestroyed, stretched in wintry array before us. Our wooden walls looked as though an army had used them for their targets; so did all trees and fence-posts on the side facing the storm. But the fields and gardens presented a still more extraordinary appearance. The corn that had towered so proudly the day before, was gone—not a stalk visible; vegetables and plants had vanished totally; the grain was prostrate, and more than half buried too. Vast gullies disfigured the fields, strewed with wrecks of trees, and other evidences of destruction. Some of the greatest ornaments of our hill-sides and meadows were uprooted, and the famous old sycamore by the shore (that, in the childhood of the oldest inhabitant, had shared a similar fate, yet, with tenacious love of life, had resigned itself to its unwonted posture, and, sending forth new shoots, again lifted itself towards heaven) was again subverted; between its thick, upright roots, now become stems, our youngster used to play at hide and seek. As we looked from the highest eminence upon the land, the prospect was of December rather than of June. Except the house, the desolation was complete.

This was a heavy disappointment, it must be acknowledged; but the immediate dispensations of the Almighty bear not the sting that the ingratitude or perfidy of man sometimes attaches to those that come through his instrumentality. So we felt it, and were thankful that so much was yet spared to us. The hurricane had, fortunately, been restricted to a small section of country. Inflicting but little injury (I think) before it crossed the river, it left untouched the two neighbouring plantations, and, extending eastward some 18 or 20 miles, destroyed much cattle and other property in its devastating course. Many families had suffered more than ourselves. Our injuries and losses proved not so severe and ruinous as was first anticipated. The corn, found buried about a foot beneath the ground, replanted, yielded in its season about half the crop of its early promise, and the other grains one-third. Much extra work was required; a shade of melancholy was,

for a while, thrown over the house; and it was a month or more before our eyes experienced the relief of well-developed verdure immediately around us.

Besides the privation of those sine qua nons, good beef and good butter, which the most imaginative of his friends could never have credited that Dr. Bird could live contentedly without for months (inasmuch as, with good bread, they formed the staples that supported his life and health for many years, indifferent as he was to most luxuries), the want of society must have been felt, though not acknowledged, as a slight drawback. At least so the women fancied, when they noticed the joy that illumined his face at the sight of the few friends that found their way to this out-of-the-world nook; and more touching still, tho' rather amusing, the evident delight with which he would throw down his tools and rush to the gate at the first glimpse of a neighbour, who was fond of visiting him, who, tho' a plain unpretending farmer, was a citizen, and the only intelligent specimen of mankind the vicinity had yet brought to light.

Further observation confirmed the opinion that, with few exceptions, our white neighbours were about on a par with our black ones. To be sure, they were not such thieves—at least we had not about their premises the ocular demonstration in the way of tomatoes and other hitherto undreamed of luxuries, ripening on the roofs of houses and porches, and heaps of golden apples that grew, we well knew, nowhere but at Bendico, that formed quite a feature in the negro-village—but they were fully as ignorant, and less good-humoured. One specimen of them we had, for a while, in the family, a half-savage orphan girl whom, after various rides in search of a house-servant, and an unusual waste of eloquence, Dr. Bird had succeeded in hiring from a cruel relative, whose severities were the talk of the neighbourhood. While confusion reigned supreme in the first weeks of our sojourn, Debby was quite useful; and when leisure allowed attention to the proprieties of life, pity and humanity prompted to efforts to raise her

from the depth of brutish ignorance in which she was plunged. It was to no purpose. Vain were the combings and scrubbings, and nice new garments; vain were the teachings of the alphabet and catechism, even when the little two-year-old, who had picked up his letters and ideas with his playthings, came to the rescue; no, Debby never could distinguish between straight I and round O; Debby never could elevate her thoughts to the conception of a God. Her delight was to eat with the blacks, certainly her superiors; to play with the pigs, almost her equals; and—most noble of her likings—to roam the woods, from morning till midday, in quest of the neighbours' cows, to secure the supply of milk for her little master's breakfast. Poor Debby could never reconcile herself to Christian civilization; after two or three months' trial, she ran away with her new clothes and her little dog, Watch, preferring her uncle's beatings to the restraints of a decent family.

Dr. Bird took great pleasure in walks with his little boy; over the hill-side, in the woods—sometimes, for a fragrant nosegay, climbing the tall magnolias that, clustered in a favoured spot, grew to the height of twenty or thirty feet—resting a while here, taking a ride there on Sukie's back, it was surprising how much land the little body could traverse, tho' often brought back in papa's arms. But the favorite ramble was the river-shore. There was no tiring of that. The pebbly shore was so pleasant to walk on, the thrown pebbles made such beautiful ripples, the boats skimming along looked so lively and inviting. The old dead tree on the promontory's end, with its eagle's nest at top, was always an object of curiosity; there was no end to the attractions of the shore. The youngster was very fond of exploration, and sometimes inclined to carry his peregrinations further than his parents deemed desirable. On one of these occasions, having run ahead, he came to a sudden curve in the bank, and was hidden from sight. Upon reaching the point, Dr. Bird proposed our hiding behind some thick bushes, as there was no danger whatever to the child, and see what he would do.

After running on and amusing himself some ten or fifteen minutes, he suddenly bethought him of his companions. He looked around—no one was to be seen—he examined the hiding places—ran behind the bushes—called his parents; he evidently was not frightened—his voice proved that—and, getting no satisfaction, he stopped to deliberate; then turning himself slowly round, as if to ascertain his bearings (the low house was invisible and full half a mile distant), he resolutely turned his face homewards, singing in his baby way very loud, for company, and trudging manfully along. "He will do," said his father, with great satisfaction; "I am rejoiced to find him a philosopher; he'll be able to take care of himself, I hope." When rejoined by his parents, and asked what he meant to do, he answered, "Oh, I was going home, to be sure."

But what had become of the new house? Was it rising on the hill, or alongside the old cabin on the shore? Long ago was its place settled, near the grand old chesnut, on the skirt of the wood crowning the hill, whence was the fine prospect of the Chesapeake. But human calculations are often frustrated, and even country-houses cannot be built without money. Little did Dr. Bird think, when he took possession of those beautiful lands, that he should be prevented from the improvement of them by the injustice of others. More than sufficient for his purpose was justly due him from several quarters, but he had especially and confidently relied on the receipt of funds of which there was no earthly reason to suppose he would be defrauded.[38] But this was the case, and

[38] [The refusal of Forrest to fulfill the oral agreement (as that was understood by Bird and his advisers, Black and McClellan) for production of *The Gladiator* and other plays, cast a heavy shadow over Bird's later life. An account of the disagreement was written by Mrs. Bird in several fragmentary sections of the biography. (Extracts from some of these sections are given in Foust, *Life and Dramatic Works of Robert Montgomery Bird*, p. 71.) In one of these she wrote: "I am unable to judge whether this be a suitable occasion or not for a public statement of Forrest's dealings with Dr. Bird. Such a course will probably be rendered necessary before long by Forrest himself, and painful and (as many would think) humiliating as these disclosures are, they are

other resources failed him. Times were out of joint—a financial crisis was blighting all interests, and none more than that of literature. But for that, arrangements could have been made to remedy the difficulty. It was no time to sell books; how discouraging then the writing of them, with so little prospect of remuneration,—remuneration at the best so meagre, except in the case of the Uncle Toms, etc. The prospects were so uninviting that he abandoned the work for which he had amassed materials, and which he had stolen the moments to begin. This was a "History of the United States," the first of a long-projected series suitable to maturer years. In addition were the losses of half his crops. Finally, most unwillingly obliged to relinquish his hopes, he seriously weighed the pros and cons of wintering in the old cabin. To that course the womenkind with one voice inclined. But Dr. Bird took another view of the matter. There were two aged inmates of the house, one threatened with a terrible disease —he might be away—no decent white man within two miles —no physician within ten—accommodations insufficient against the wintry cold—what to do in sickness under such circumstances? A simultaneous and rather sharp touch of ague—that ague which is always "down in that hollow," or "off by that marsh," but *never* where anybody lives—attacking himself and me, settled the business, and sent us flying back to our old quarters in New Castle. The feelings of regret with which Dr. Bird took leave of this spot of many hopes, among others as the nucleus of a colony of relatives and friends, who were eagerly waiting the result of his experiment to follow him, are faintly shadowed in a letter penned September 25, 1840, just before his departure.

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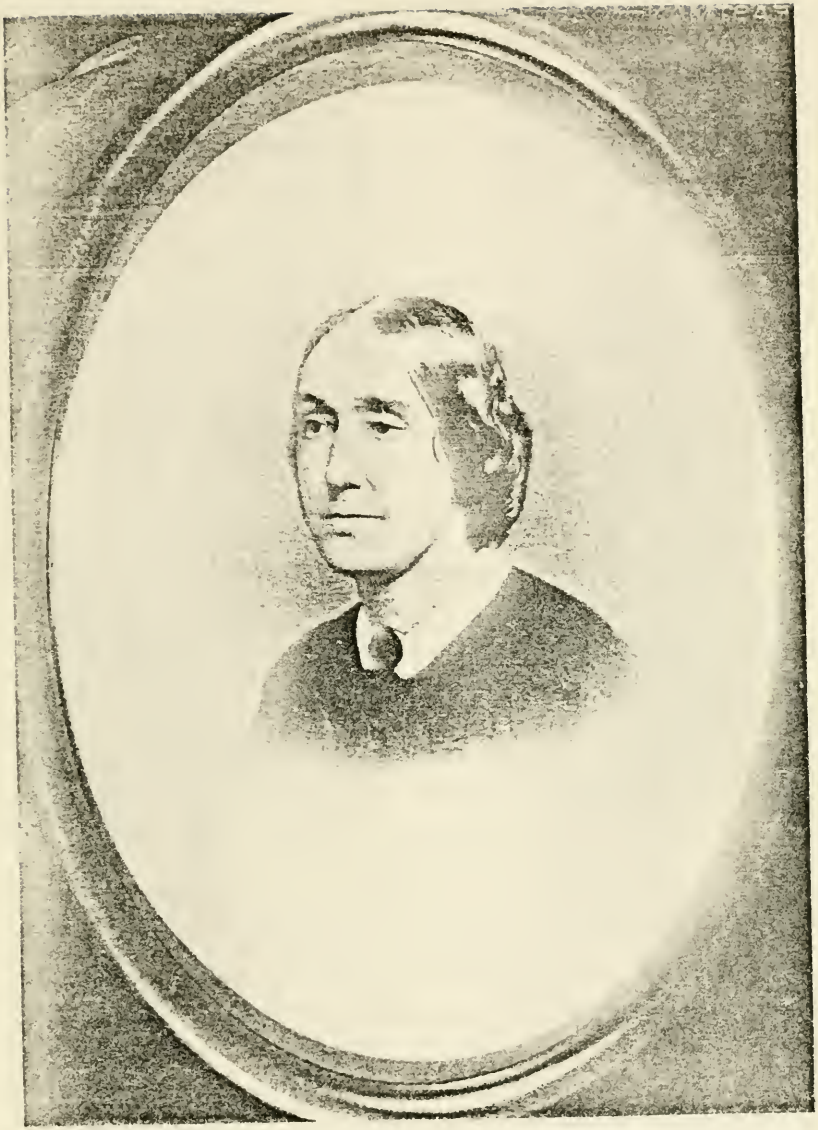
due to both truth and justice. The bare facts speak for themselves. The author received for four tragedies five thousand dollars. The actor made from *The Gladiator* alone, at the lowest computation, 100,000 dollars, probably twice or thrice that sum. *The Gladiator* was played 1000 times during Dr. Bird's life time." Apparently, however, she never wrote the statement in finished form for incorporation in the biography.]

I am more sorry to leave the farm than I can express. I cannot look around me but my eyes fill. Here we could, and might have been, so happy, had my beggarly fate been a little more propitious. The season of health and delight has just begun. That light frost has cleared off disease, and started the Indian Summer. All is peace and beauty. A soft mist pallors the atmosphere; and hill, river, and wood sleep in loveliness. The tender touches of autumn are upon the trees—faint, sweet tints of yellow and red peeping out from the deeper green. Yes, the beauty of Bendico is just beginning, and you—have left it; and I am leaving it too. Alas! if I could get you back, before the vessel is loaded, I believe I should send her off empty, and stay in spite of fortune. What a weak undecided creature I have become! But, in truth, decision is not a virtue for beggars. Had I money enough for removing the evils here, which money could remove, I would not leave the farm on any account. It is the season, too, when we were to have begun our improvements—to set out our trees—to— But it only saddens me to think of these things, and I will think of something else.

This farm, which Dr. Bird was afterwards obliged to sell, has since verified his wisdom and foresight in its purchase. The judicious application of capital has developed its natural advantages, and it is now, I understand, the seat of a flourishing settlement, and has probably made the fortune of its owner.

## XI. Last Years

The instability of human affairs, tho' productive of much sorrow to weak mortals, yet has the merit of developing traits that otherwise might have remained dormant. As the life of a rustic had brought out a new phase of character in Dr. Bird, so his return to civilized life was signalized by the exertion of powers in an entirely different field. Before he took possession of his farm his medical friends, foremost of whom was Dr. George McClellan, had been very desirous to see him established in a professorial chair in one of our cities. Many plans were suggested, and overtures made from several places, but the West, where Dr. Bird numbered many friends, and whither his eyes were often wistfully turned, offered the most brilliant attractions—attractions to which he would have sacrificed his farm, but for one circumstance. He had a mother—in her early life possessed of all the goods of fortune, but who, for years, had struggled in the shade of adversity with difficulty and privation. For that mother, as soon as he was able, he had provided a home, and determined to make it one of comfort and peace. There was she mistress; even when he married, with the hearty concurrence of his wife her privileges were not curtailed, and only when increasing infirmities prompted her to seek more repose, did she lay aside the duties and honors of head of the house. No important change did Dr. Bird ever allow himself to make in disregard of her convenience, and as he had before, more than once, cheerfully surrendered manifest advantages to himself, to promote her comfort, so, once more, when he beheld her evident repugnance, her natural disinclination to remove so far from accustomed scenes and friends, he waived his interests, and abandoned all projects in that quarter. However, in the May following his reappearance in New Castle, he re-



Mary Mayer Bird

Date Unknown

ceived an appointment to the chair of Institutes and Materia Medica in Pennsylvania College, a comparatively new institution but which, under a very able corps of professors, had met with remarkable success. This appointment he accepted, and, commencing without delay the preparation for his new duties, was ready at the beginning of the ensuing term for their fulfillment. He delivered two full courses of lectures in this College, in the winters of 1841-'42 and 1842-'43, continuing in connection with it till the disorganization of the Faculty. During these winters he occupied an office in Philadelphia, his family remaining, from prudential motives, in Delaware. In January of the last winter he was laid up for several weeks with a terrible attack of quinsey, and, for the fifth or sixth time, had his tonsils cut. Of the gentlemen associated with him in Pennsylvania College, two—Dr. George McClellan and Dr. Samuel G. Morton, were most intimate friends, and another, Walter R. Johnson, had been his school-master.

Although lecturing was a new thing to Dr. Bird, the requisite studies were not so. With him, knowledge acquired once, did not evaporate, but remained stored away for future use. Besides, he had kept himself cognizant of all the novelties in Physic, and had, especially since his residence in New Castle, resumed with great ardor his investigations in chemistry (commencing with agricultural, in reference to his farm), always a favorite science. That department would have suited his tastes better than the one he filled, but it made very little difference, and none, probably, as to the execution of his duties, and while he never neglected the obligations of his chair, he felt new interest in those collateral pursuits—an interest that never afterwards abated.

Photography was full of attractions for him. He hailed with delight the beautiful discovery, the embodiment of his own vague and poetical ideas, and watched the successive steps of its development with unflagging interest. He saw in it the efficient hand-maid of the artist, slow though *he* may be to appreciate and appropriate its services. In that view, and to

that end, he devoted most of his leisure moments for several of his later years, arriving, with his limited time and imperfect materials, at an approximation to the results that now confer such honor upon French enterprise, taste, and research. The time occupied in these investigations and operations was after collecting and selecting the materials for his day's work, when he revolved and arranged them in his mind, preparatory to writing. The object was similar to the relaxations of earlier life—not mere amusement, but a labor-saving help to accuracy—a benefit, as from the first he believed, to hundreds, eventually destined to become, by its adaptation to many purposes, a most agreeable means of support, especially to women, for whom his sympathies were deeply enlisted, and who, he saw, would derive from the application of photography, as from the sewing-machine (another object of his affection and gratitude), a release from the drudgery of the needle and other pursuits uncongenial and unsuited to the requirements of an immortal spirit. Though no advocate of Women's Rights, as declared and set forth in Women's Conventions, none ever was more solicitous to see woman placed in her proper position, and to open new and pleasant by-roads to support or competence, to the numbers of pure and gifted, but too often needy and helpless beings, that shrink from the dust, bustle, and jostling of the highway.

It was while we resided at the farm, or soon afterwards, that Mr. John M. Clayton came to live in New Castle. It was not long before Dr. Bird was brought into companionship, and afterwards into close intimacy, with that distinguished Delawarian. That result was, no doubt, hastened by their mutual friendship for Dr. McClellan, who was a fellow-graduate, tho' not, I believe, of the same class, of Mr. Clayton.[39] This intimacy marked a new era in Dr. Bird's life, and left its impress on his subsequent career. Probably it had the immediate effect of increasing his interest in the political ques-

[39] [Clayton graduated at Yale in 1815 and McClellan in 1816.]

tions that agitated the day—if this could be increased, for not observation alone, but bitter personal experience of the depression of business, and all other evil results of the measures then in force, had roused him to the exertion of his powers to effect a change. He entered the field of politics with no ambitious views, for he had previously declined honors in that line, honors tendered in a way the most flattering; in 1842 it was the desire of the most influential Whigs to nominate him as Representative in Congress,[40] and afterwards to the Senate of the United States. The latter position was worthy of him, but I doubt his powers of surviving two sessions in the "Bear Garden" of Washington. He entered politics merely with an honest desire to serve his country. With the exception of one or two scathing rebukes extorted from his pen, in the seclusion of his study, in condemnation of

[40] [Foust was in error when he wrote (*op. cit.*, p. 125) that Bird "reluctantly consented and took the stump in his own behalf" after George B. Rodney had stated he was not a candidate for renomination. The movement to nominate Bird was started by John M. Clayton. Mrs. Bird counselled earnestly, even pleaded, against acceptance, both for personal and domestic reasons and for his own welfare. "I do *not* believe it will be to your advantage to enter into a political contest," she wrote him, "or even to win political honours. - - - - I am very sure you would be wearied and disgusted before the election was over, and still more so before you had been a month at Washington." Bird admitted that "a good professorship would suit me, every way, better than a seat in C.," and that "my *feelings* are against the matter—they are with you entirely." Yet the thought of accepting appealed to him strongly, chiefly for financial reasons ("It is a point of bread and butter; a temporary make-shift," he wrote), and for the prestige he thought it would give him. Among his papers are several drafts of speeches which he prepared in anticipation of the nomination, one an acceptance speech, to be addressed to the Whig convention, at which he would be present as a delegate, and one a "stump speech." These are the speeches to which Foust refers, but they were never delivered. There was a wide-spread feeling that Rodney would not refuse a renomination, but no unequivocal statement could be secured from him, and Bird grew weary of the whole affair. "His shilly-shallying has rather cooled my ambition," he wrote, and, two days before the convention met: "Mr. Rodney *has* declined. - - - - Nevertheless, we shall probably renominate him. At all events, *I* shall avoid the honour, and trust to Fortune in another line." For this decision he gave principal credit to his wife's disapproving letters. "I felt the good sense, and I admired the judgment, above a woman's, which was not captivated by the bait of ambition."]

the wicked folly or treacherous design of mis-called patriots, he had never before taken part in politics further than in depositing his vote in the ballot-box, but now he did good service. In the campaign of 1844 he was repeatedly called upon for speeches, and traversed the state in various directions for that purpose; he was one of the delegates to the great National Whig Convention held at Baltimore in April; he prepared a Memoir of General Stockton, and was instrumental in effecting his election. So great was the stake, he sacrificed personal convenience and domestic quiet completely, for no one ever more prized the privileges of privacy, the enjoyments of home, or was more thoroughly averse to the confusion of a crowd. This season was the only one, I have reason to believe, in which he departed from his rule of seclusion. After the great defeat of the Whigs, he never gave himself up so completely to politics, tho' always continuing to take great interest and frequently operating in one way or other in state or local questions. The villagers used to call upon him repeatedly for advice and help, especially if writing were to be done, and it seemed to me that every petition or memorial to Congress or the Legislature, as indeed all like documents, must be prepared by him, besides other occasional writing on a variety of topics.

During his residence in New Castle he revised his four dramas, *Pelopidas, The Gladiator, Oralloossa,* and *The Broker of Bogota;* commenced a novel, "Mrs. Munchovy," a satire on the *isms* of the day,[11] also a memoir of the Hon. John M. Clayton, which he carried to the year 1836 or '37, I think; collected materials for a history of the annexation of Texas and the Mexican War, the progress of which he watched with the deepest interest; and drew up a plan for the organization of the Smithsonian Institution. This plan, the result of deep thought and frequent reflection, when published in the North American of December 7, 1846, commanded universal attention, and elicited from various quarters questions as to

[11] ["The Letters and Memorials of the Celebrated Mrs. Munchovy: Illustrating the Progress of the New Philosophy."]

its authorship, communications of a most laudatory nature, and, on the part of some uninterested persons, the expression of belief that no one was more fitted to take a prominent place in such an Institution than the author of such a plan. Such sequence, tho' most agreeable, and proper too, I venture to say, was not in the imagination of the author when he conceived and executed the idea.[42]

But his chief labours during these years of village life, were in chemistry. Among other matters that claimed his attention, was the manufacture of nitre and saltpetre, and still more that of magnesia, and his experiments in the preparation of a superior form of that article, at a cheap price, had resulted in complete success. He was delayed from the establishment of works for this purpose by the difficulty of procuring a suitable lot and buildings, but he was near the attainment of this desirable object when the project was knocked in the head by his purchase of a share in the North American and consequent transfer to Philadelphia.

To those who visited him in his study was presented a motley assemblage. The shelves and counter (for it had been originally a store, and Dr. Bird preferred to keep it in that state) were covered with books and papers, tools of all sorts, bottles, chemicals, tubes and crucibles, specimens of all sorts from land and water, most of them carefully enveloped in paper, and all most scrupulously labelled, though they were reckoned by thousands. He was exceedingly particular on this point, and carried out the principle with respect to every article, however simple or trifling in quantity. Many can bear

[42] [Senator Clayton endeavored to procure for him the position of Assistant Secretary (and Librarian) of the Smithsonian Institution under Joseph Henry, who had been appointed Secretary, and for a little while was hopeful of his appointment. Strong influence, however, was exerted on behalf of Charles C. Jewett, then librarian of Brown University, and he was appointed on Henry's recommendation. Henry had previously stated to Clayton that "he wished to get rid of Jewitt [*sic*] and Mr. Choate's demands on him," and gave him to understand that he wanted Bird, and Clayton felt certain, he wrote to Bird, that it was "the *original condition* of Henry's election that Jewitt should be appointed by him!"]

witness to this trait. He worked with tools a good deal, mended the locks or like matters about the house, made frames for the garden vines, lived much in the open air, and, with few exceptions, enjoyed good health. One of these exceptions was occasioned by a violent quinsey in the spring of 1845, when, after days of terrible pain and suffering from want of water (for he could swallow neither food nor drink) Dr. McClellan, with a friend, suddenly burst into the parlor, where I happened to be at the moment. "The very man I wanted," I exclaimed. "Oh, the Doctor; yes, I know—one of his quinsies—I'll fix him—stay there." In half a minute or less this friend in need called me: "He's in Paradise, you see." And so, to be sure, he seemed, walking about in a perfect rapture of delight and gratitude. The Doctor had forcibly inserted his penknife into the closed jaws. It was not the first time his promptitude and skill had saved his friend from days of needless suffering. Besides these attacks, Dr. Bird had several premonitions of that insidious stomachic affection that afterwards occasioned such agony, and sapped the foundations of life itself. On the occurrence of the first of these he was unconscious for a time, and thought, when coming to, he was on the verge of apoplexy.

Most anxious as was Dr. Bird to be in a position for securing a support to his family, and laying up a little for a rainy day, and brilliant as were the inducements to that effect, as well as in regard to influence and usefulness, held out by the new project, it was with the sincerest regret he finally left his native village, and the dear and familiar faces of its inhabitants, especially of those whose friendship traced back to infantile days. The purchase of the share of the North American, to which he was most warmly urged by numbers of influential friends, was effected, as is well known, through the munificence of his friend John M. Clayton, who actually forced upon him, reluctant to the last degree, and after a positive refusal on his part, the acceptance of the large loan necessary for the purpose, without any security but the honour of his

debtor. The motives that finally prevailed for the suppression of his scruples, and his departure from the rule of never speculating on another's money, were of a nature that, while they exhibited some of his peculiarities, would at the same time, if it were allowable to mention them, only confer honor upon him. He at once commenced his labours in the city, in the heat of July, 1847.

His qualifications and success in this new line it is needless to refer to. Unremitting in his exertions, constant in his attention to duty, in heat and cold, through the dreariest storms of winter, in the midst of sickness that would have confined many a man to the house, he never deserted his post. The difficulties of a new enterprise, the embarrassments and disappointments, fortunately but temporary, of the first two years, while they silently undermined his health and spirits, served but to increase his energy, perseverance, and devotion, and until, in the course of years, his failing constitution imperatively required it, he never took a holiday, was never absent from his office, save in the case of dangerous illness in his family* or that of Mr. Clayton, or calls of business. His varied stores of information caused him to be considered as a sort of walking dictionary or encyclopedia among the employees of the establishment, to whom also he was endeared by his kind and considerate attention to their welfare. His prudence, invaluable in his line of duty, was most remarkable, his truth and accuracy were unimpeachable, his statistics never at fault. Perhaps to those who knew him best, his Truth, Integrity, and Self-Denial stand out most prominent characteristics. In his dealings he preferred being imposed upon by others, to taking the slightest advantage of any circumstances in his own favor.

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*His mother died at an advanced age in the commencement of the year following his removal to the city. The most indulgent of women, she was greatly and justly beloved in the tenderest manner by all her children. In her youth she had been much admired for her wit and gaiety, not only in her native village but in the larger circles of Philadelphia to which the position of her relatives gave her access.

An anecdote or two may illustrate some of these points. A very responsible post in the office was, for a short time, occupied by a young man, whose unqualified recommendations as to business capacity caused him to be regarded as quite an acquisition. Some of his innovations, tho' not quite to their tastes, were overlooked by the proprietors; but one day, upon taking up a business envelope, Dr. Bird was startled by an unusual device. The stamp, under the North American heading, was adorned with a long row of figures, signifying the extraordinary circulation of that newspaper. The inquiry immediately followed, by whose orders such change was introduced, and the presence of the gentleman was requested. "Did you, Mr. ——, order these envelopes?" "Yes, Sir, I did." "And pray tell me what is the circulation of the North American? How long since it came up to this figure?" After some hesitation: "Oh, it is not exactly so large *now,* but counting the dailies and the weekly, *and what it is going to be,* it is not much above the mark. Every body knows the North American makes the next largest issue to the Ledger, and that is the New York way of doing business." Dr. Bird replied: "It may be the New York way, but it will not suit Philadelphia—and whatever way it is, *I never countenance a lie,"* and ordered the destruction of the false envelopes. Soon after, the foreman of the press room gave him the information that, for the second time, Mr. —— was paying the men in uncurrent money (of which there was always an abundant receipt). This was another way of doing business that Dr. Bird did not relish, and with indignation he ordered the indemnification of the men, protesting that whatever losses the proprietors might endure should not be shared by their hands.

With most tempting opportunities to indulge in speculation —advised and urged by some who were making their thousands a day (and what more cogent incentive to fast money-making than the ever-felt pressure of a heavy debt?)—he never yielded to the enticement, but kept aloof as from other species of gambling. He carried his scruples as to what he

regarded unworthy ways of advancing his interest to a remarkable degree. A proof of this was exhibited on one occasion, when he came near offending a most esteemed literary friend by refusing a place in the North American to an article, or series of articles—very just and well written, too—on a prominent railroad interest. As it happened that he had, a short time before, made a temporary investment in that stock (to save his interest, and perhaps increase the amount till the addition of another half-year's profits should enable him to make a handsome payment on his bond), it was naturally thought he would be rather pleased to present conspicuously to public notice arguments and facts that could not fail to have the effect of raising the value of the stock. Dr. Bird saw clearly the advantages of publication, but he had certain singular, peculiar, and very rigid notions as to bribery and corruption, and any left-handed ways of advancing his interests. Some weeks later, having sold his shares, he sent word he was *now* free to publish the articles, as he owned nothing in that quarter. The stock *did* rise, but Dr. Bird did not regret his course.

He certainly has no claims to that species of enterprise, so glorified in this our generation, that leads to material success. But if he lack the sympathy of the million, who see in the accumulation of the almighty dollar the sure criterion of genius (a discovery reserved for the bright minds of this age and country), he never bartered his self-respect by descending to unworthy means for its acquisition, or base subserviency to its mere possession, or dishonoured his poverty by extravagant outlay or even the commonest self-indulgence. He conformed his expenditures most strictly to his circumstances. I never saw or heard of one equally sensitive as to pecuniary obligations. He could not bear a debt. Of the few bills he allowed, he was most punctual in their discharge, and was always ready to meet the modest request for a few dollars before pay-day by the discharge of the whole. Had his purse been as expansive as his heart, good service would

it have done in the cause of benevolence and the patronage of talent. With the most enthusiastic love and just appreciation of the fine arts, it was a severe trial to refrain from its indulgence, and most rare was the occasion, and then only in a small way, that he departed from the rule of self-denial. One of these was the purchase of a share in a Western Art Union, in which "The Greek Slave" was the conspicuous prize. He bought it, he said, because it recalled forcibly the pleasant passage in his early life with Powers, and he thought he *ought* to secure "The Greek Slave," tho' he had not the slightest idea he *should.* As to the rest, if he greatly fancied any thing, as a fine camera at one time, he made a calculation and cut off his favorite segar until it had paid the required sum. Yet found he many ways of being generous.

He had the greatest aversion to a crowd. Essentially a man of the closet, he avoided all public assemblies, and took no pleasure in spectacles of any sort. The same may be said of all associations; he had an invincible repugnance to connect himself with any. Even the concerts of the Swedish Nightingale he attended rarely, and then chiefly to gratify the female members of his family. He never ran after or cared to see great men; he scarcely ever delivered a letter of introduction, and brought back from England, and the different cities he visited in our own country, nearly all the introductions he had carried with him.

It seemed to be not only the choice, but the necessity of his nature to live in retirement. He could not exist without books; they were his constant companions, his solace in sickness and trouble. Them he preferred to the choicest exhibitions in oratory. Unless when much hurried, he never accomplished the different operations of dressing without the consultation of one or more volumes, or the production of a string of notes or memoranda to help his memory, which he always avowed to be very bad, tho' no one else ever discovered it except as to any matter of gossip, which, according to the vulgar saying, passed out of one ear as it went in at the other.

These aids undoubtedly served to impress facts so strongly on his mind, and they were found in heaps on his table, or in his hat or hand. Moderate in all other enjoyments, he was insatiate in thirst for knowledge; he could not bear to let any slip out of his reach. He collected in scrap-books a vast amount of statistics, curiosities in literature or history, novelties in art and mechanics, crimes and accidents, clipped from the evanescent products of the press. In regard to one or two of the items, crimes and accidents for instance, he had once an idea of giving them to the world in book-form, with the hope of a beneficial moral effect, but the humiliating and revolting rapidity with which the volume grew in one or two years, deterred him from the enterprise, and convinced him that human life in America was at too low a discount to receive any increase of regard from even so shocking an exhibition. This practice, continued through life, was the means of collecting a vast amount of materials. During the languor attendant upon his attacks of disease, Walter Scott was his great stand-by, and cheered many a wearisome hour. Among his immortal productions, *The Bride of Lammermoor* always produced the deepest emotions, from which it took him several days to recover.

Frank and unreserved as to externals, he regarded most strictly the sanctities of private life, and, most tenacious of his own, was never known to intrude upon another's privacy, nor to advert, in general conversation, to the most sacred relationships. Constant in his friendships, he would never allow a slur upon an absent one, and even an unpleasant truth uttered with reference to them, gave him pain. For years he has not pronounced the name of some who, formerly intimate, had forfeited their claims to his respect. Tho' merciful in judgment of others, he was severe upon himself in all that he regarded his duty. During the pressure of his last illness he wrote almost daily editorials, some of which, especially the last, written only ten days before his death, were of a most pleasant, lively nature.

The attacks of illness, frequently recurring for several years, increased in severity. In 1852 he was laid up three times, in March, July, and October-November. For the first time, his affairs being now in most promising condition, he gave himself some indulgence in short trips with his family and spending (to their unspeakable amazement) a week of idleness at Cape May. After he was sufficiently recovered from the last and most serious attack, by the orders of his physician he took a more extended jaunt, revisiting the West. This journey appeared to renew his constitution, as he suffered no more from the same disease. The ensuing year he passed four weeks in quiet but heart-felt enjoyment at the Delaware Water Gap with his family, the revival of recollections of his previous visits evidently affording him great pleasure. At the request of some female members of his family party, and with the amiable desire of assisting them in their drawings from nature, he on this occasion renewed his acquaintance with the pencil. Although disused for sixteen years, it had lost none of its point or exactness. Upon comparison of his hasty sketches with the operations, at the same spot, of that master artist, the sun, as revealed by the camera he carried with him, the outlines were identical. The resumption of this favorite accomplishment afforded him great pleasure, and was the chief and soothing relaxation of the succeeding months of increasing debility, when he worked up many of the sketches taken in previous journeys.

The readiness with which he surrendered himself to the delights of this most lovely locality—the peaceful serenity of his mind—the quiet joyousness, indeed, frequently evinced, induced the belief that, at last, not only had body recovered from the inroads of disease, but his mind had regained the cheerful and healthy tone which years of heavy trials had impaired, and that a new life, brightened by the happiness that would follow his release from care, was before him.* It was, indeed, but not as we expected. The desire for rest,

* He did not think so, however, as several conversations proved.

the *quiet* enjoyment of "the glorious works of God," distinguished these excursions from those of former years, when his activity kept him in constant search of new beauties. The same gentleness, serenity, and affectionateness characterized his general intercourse. Some of the most touching passages occurred with members of his family. The spirit of humility, forgiveness, and love filled his breast.

* * * *

Here the manuscript ends. Unless some pages have been lost, Mrs. Bird closed her memoir of her husband without specific mention of his death, January 23, 1854, or of his last illness. In connection with the business management of the *North American* circumstances had arisen which greatly distressed his sense of honor and his trust in friends.[43] For two years he had suffered repeatedly "from attacks of illness of a kind calculated to depress his mind and lessen the activity of all his vital powers," wrote his brother-in-law, Edward R. Mayer. A few days before his death, wrote Mayer, he "related to me the particulars of business troubles which he said had greatly annoyed him during the previous six months, and which had contributed to make him ill. - - - - He acknowledged that all these circumstances had preyed upon his mind and lessened his confidence in one in whom he had reposed full trust; that they might, as suggested, be after all means of making him more careful of his own interests hereafter and more *justly* suspicious of his fellows, but he spoke despairingly, as if events had occurred that had settled his fate."

On a detached sheet of Mrs. Bird's manuscript we read: "His papers reveal the cares that tore his bosom, tho' his lips scarce ever adverted to the theme. Silently these cares—far more than the labours—did their work, and completed it at

[43] [A brief account of these circumstances is given in Foust, *op. cit.*, p. 150-153.]

just the time that the flourishing condition of the paper promised a speedy realization of his hopes. These are undoubted facts, but facts which perhaps it were as well for me to bury in my own breast. Although impossible to refer to them without the deepest pain, I trust I do without bitterness—recognizing over and beyond the wickedness or folly of the weak instruments of ill, the superintending Hand of Almighty Wisdom and Goodness, that permitted these trials for the purification of the character and preparation of the heart for, I humbly trust, the blessings that await the righteous,—and an additional confirmation of the belief that the gifts of intellect and graces of the heart, so cramped in their exercise here below, are destined for a sphere of never-ending improvement, usefulness, and enjoyment."

## Appendix

Although Mrs. Bird, with characteristic modesty and self-effacement, endeavored to leave herself out of her memoir of her husband, it seems fitting to append to her work this brief statement concerning her. She was born in Philadelphia, September 23, 1809, one of eight children of Rev. Philip Frederick Mayer and Lucy W. (Rodman) Mayer, both of whom were born in New York. Her father, a Lutheran clergyman, was called in 1806 to St. John's Church in Philadelphia. There he served for fifty-two years, until his death, beloved by his congregation and widely known for scholarly attainments and for eloquence as a preacher. For thirty-four years he was a trustee of the University of Pennsylvania. From such parentage and environment Mary Mayer received the good general education, the culture and refinement of taste, the sound principles and high ideals, which are reflected in her letters and in her story of her husband's life.

Introduction of young Dr. Bird into the Mayers' family circle is probably the event recorded on a small slip of paper, among other memoranda jotted down by Mrs. Bird: "Winter '31, '32, we met Dr. at Miss Peters'." Between the youthful dramatist—already famous for *The Gladiator*—and two of the family in particular, Mary and Caroline, first acquaintance was followed by cordial intimacy and warm friendship. This is delightfully reflected in the correspondence between them when he was on his journeys: in his letters addressed impartially to them—to Caroline, his "Minerva," and to Mary, his "Muse"—and in theirs to him, playful and affectionate in tone. Between him and Mary this friendly attachment ripened into something deeper, and they were married, in a quiet ceremony befitting the bride's retiring nature and the groom's uncertain prospects, July 13, 1837. A son, whom

# VALEDICTORY

In this brief valedictory message to the Friends of the Library, in the last issue of the *Library Chronicle* which I shall have the pleasure of editing, I trust I shall not seem to be looking backward rather than forward if I quote the words with which John Langdon Sibley closed his report as librarian of Harvard in 1861:

> Strike out of existence every influence which the instructors and pupils, and through them the community, have ever received from the Library, and it is impossible to form an idea of what would be the consequences. The spirit which the Adamses and the Otises, Hancock and Quincy, imbibed from the few books on English liberty, undoubtedly exerted no small influence in bringing about the Revolution of 1776, and forming the civil government and the state of society which, for the greater part of a century, have made the United States the most enviable nation on earth. More than ever before is now demanded by the community and the world, and the demand cannot be met successfully, or with credit to the University, without making the Library a never-failing fountain of the freshest and best results of the human mind.

The echo of these words, true in a vastly larger sense than in 1861, may be heard today—"more than ever before is now demanded"—and great should be our sense of responsibility. May the coming years bring, in this University and elsewhere, a deeper conception of the responsibility of the library as a vital part of our educational system.

On behalf of the undergraduates in particular, coming and going in rapid succession for a brief four years of training for life, I renew the plea which I have made on other occasions. For advanced students and scholars we must supply the needed books. The undergraduates must be encouraged and instructed in the use of books. Most of them come to us

utterly untrained in their use, and but dimly aware of their importance. Few will overcome these deficiencies if they can do so only through the medium of a card catalog of a collection numbering a million volumes. It is not feasible to give the entire student body access to the stacks; and, if it were feasible, it would be futile, for the purpose of meeting this need, for not one underclassman in a hundred could make wise use of the privilege. It would not be sufficient to provide a "browsing room" containing several hundred volumes of recreational reading, set off by overstuffed chairs and lounges, for this would be giving them cake instead of bread. Lolling in the midst of books does not impart skill in their use or appreciation of their value.

What is needed is an undergraduate open-shelf collection of not less than ten thousand volumes; a collection which would invite self-introduction to "the freshest and best results of the human mind" in all departments of knowledge; which would serve both for recreational reading and as a laboratory, where much of the student's curricular work could be done; which would lead gradually and naturally to intelligent use of the larger resources of the stacks. In such a collection—I quote from a plea for this same need which I made in the *Library Chronicle* just two years ago—the student "could begin to learn to use books with skill and intelligent discrimination; to 'master' books—that is, make them his servants—to serve as a source of information, as a basis for formation of intelligent opinion and sound judgment."

For the interest and support received from the Friends of the Library in the last thirteen years, our gratitude is deep. The future will present still greater needs and greater opportunities, for "more than ever before is now demanded"—by the community OF the world.

C.S.T.

# AN ITINERANT PORTRAIT PAINTER

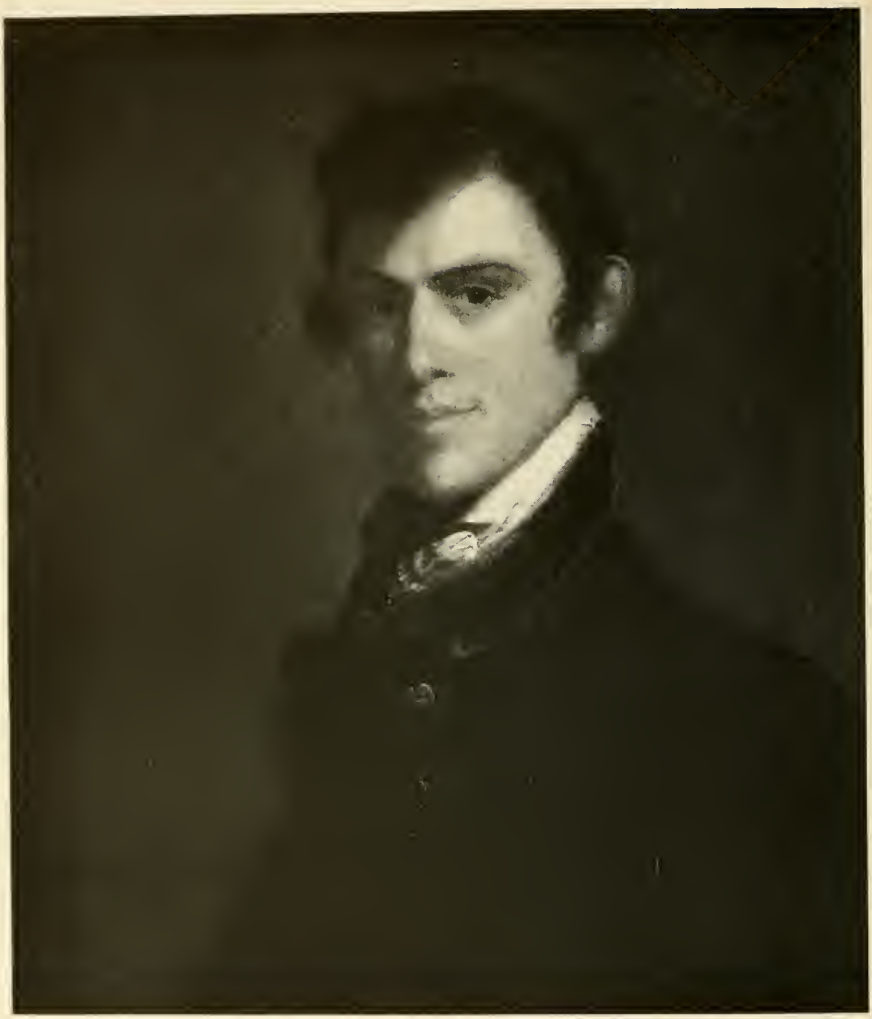
Readers of the biography of Robert Montgomery Bird, which was completed in our September issue, will remember the close friendship of Bird and John Grimes, which began in their ramblings and sketching expeditions about Philadelphia and ended only with the death of Grimes in 1837. As a supplement to the biography we are here printing the letters which have been preserved among Bird's papers, written by Grimes to Bird between 1829 and 1837.

Grimes was born at Lexington, Ky., in 1799. As his letters indicate, he received little schooling, but he possessed an innate artistic talent which won for him the privilege of studying under Matthew Harris Jouett, a fellow-Kentuckian who had established himself in Lexington after studying under Gilbert Stuart. Of his life little is known, and his letters give more information than has previously been available concerning his wanderings. He came to Philadelphia sometime before 1824, where a close friendship developed between him and another Kentuckian, Dr. J. Roberts Black, through whom he became acquainted with Bird. In 1829 he went to Cincinnati. In 1831, after painting for some time in his home town, Lexington, he went to Huntsville, Ala., where he made his headquarters until 1832, when he settled in Nashville. There he remained until forced to go further south, in 1837, in quest of health.

The letters reveal a loyal, warm-hearted friend, even more impractical and unsophisticated than Bird in business matters; because of his "rare excellencies and devoted attachment," Mrs. Bird tells us, Bird always referred to him as "one of the very few perfectly unworldly, unselfish, disinterested beings he had ever known." They give, too, an intimate view of the ups and downs of his brief career. The profession of itinerant

portrait painter was not of such a "seducing kind" that he was indifferent to possible opportunities for more lucrative occupation, and he was thus led into an unhappy venture into the bookselling business. On the whole, however, he seems to have enjoyed considerable success, and acquired such reputation that he was frequently engaged to "paint pictures of dead persons and of persons that I never saw," and made "what was considered a good likeness" from description alone.

One of the portraits painted by Grimes (Charles Wetherill) was copied by Thomas Sully in 1853. Two of his portraits are reproduced in Samuel W. Price's *Old Masters of the Bluegrass* (*Filson Club Publications,* No. 17, Louisville, 1902).



JOHN GRIMES
Painted by Matthew H. Jouett
*(Courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art)*

Phila. Aug. 12th 1829.

My Dr. Bird.

I should have written you before—but then you know it has been so d—d hot that the labour of writing even a letter would have disolved me. With all the care that I could take of myself I felt several times upon the point of evaporation and but for the timely application of a glass of ice cream or a glass of mineral water I verily believe that I should have gone off in the form of a gas. The change in the atmosphere this morning has however brought me down to the consistancy of calves foot jelly—or candles such as you buy six for a *leven pence* half tallow and half hogs lard, and I take advantage of the first moment of my return to the state of a *solid* to write you, and to acknowledge the recept of yours of the 29th July.

There is nothing new here at present. Shaw[1] and Nagle[2] have appeared to drop the subject of which is the most dignified, Landscape or portrait. Bridport[3] has gone to Lancaster, where he expects to paint some minatures, and I am doing very little. I had intended to take an excursion to some place and Dorsey sugested Frederic, and promised to write me from there and inform me of the prospects, he done so a few days since, and informs that Mr. Wattles is there painting a number of portraits at $50, so you see that plan

[1] Presumably Joshua Shaw, a landscape painter, born in England in 1776. He came to Philadelphia in 1817, bringing with him Benjamin West's "Christ Healing the Sick," which West had painted for the Pennsylvania Hospital as a contribution to its funds. For many years this was displayed in "the Picture House," which was erected on the Hospital grounds for the purpose of preserving and exhibiting it. An interesting account of the Picture House and of the painting is given in Thomas G. Morton, *History of the Pennsylvania Hospital,* pp. 305-319.

[2] John Neagle, born in Boston in 1796, educated in Philadelphia. The University has eight portraits painted by him.

[3] Hugh Bridport, who was born in London in 1794, came to Philadelphia in 1816, and gained a wide reputation as a portrait painter. In 1817 he opened a "drawing academy" here. He died in 1832. (Mantle Fielding, *Dictionary of American painters, sculptors, and engravers.*)

has been knocked in the head. I regret it as I should have gone there under more favourable circumstances than to any other place near here, there being already some of my portraits there. I am now endeavouring to get through with all that I have on hand, that we may be able to start to the west as soon as possible. When will you be ready? By the way there appears to be no great scarcity of painters out there. I hear of them in all quarters. There is one at present in Huntsville. Accounts from Lima are very unfavourable. Polhemus has written to his mother and discribes it as being in a wretched condition, rendered so by Earthquakes and the war. Valparaiso is discribed as being in a much better condition. He had not received my letter at the time he wrote. He will soon do so and we may expect to hear shortly more particularly as to the points we are most interested about.

You ask me if I use pure black in painting white drapery. I never do. I always mix some yellow or red or boath with it. Van Dyke brown makes a good shadow for white. You ask when I will be down to New Castle—perhaps on Sunday though I can not promise certainly—when will you be up?

Yours sincerely,

J. Grimes

Philadelphia, Tuesday, 1829

My Dr. Bird.

I was pleased to receive yours of Sunday and more pleased to hear that you "improve every day," that I should have known however after your telling me that you spend 6 or 8 hours a day at the easel. I am also pleased to hear that you have already found out that to paint slow is the fastest way. That discovery of itself is a great step toward improvement and I also perceive that you have found out that it does not do to use too much Japan in the dog days. You ask me if I use any in such hot weather. If I wish to paint on the picture every day I use a little—but it is the smalest imagi-

nable quantity, say one drop in all the white for a sitting—but if I had a place where I could put my pictures in the sun I would not use any in the white. The black requires it at all seasons, so does the lake—and ocre if used alone—but in very small quantities. You speak of the difficulty of painting drapery, and ask how to use black as a shadow for every colour—that question I find some difficulty in answering, and only do so by saying that the best way is to in all possible cases paint the drapery from nature mixing your tints as near as possible to the lights and shadows of the stuff to be painted, this is very tedious at first but the facility that a person acquires in a short time will more than ballance it in the end, besides it gives a truth to his pictures that years of practice without persuing that course will not enable him to accomplish and after he has been well studied in painting all those things *faithfully* from nature he can with much better effect make occasional departures from the things that he may place before him to copy and yet be perfectly certain that it is natural; on the other hand there is great danger that if a person neglects that course he will in a little time acquire a manner artificial and unnatural and that he will fail to give that variety to his pictures that the different subjects require. All these things you no doubt know but you will feel them more strongly as you progress and it is well to bear it in mind on all occasions.

* * * *

There is but little news here at this time, except that there has been a little *brush* between the painters. It has not amounted to much. Some time ago Shaw wrote an article in which he endeavours [to] lessen the *dignity* of portrait painting, abusing the exhibition for its containing so many and accusing the people of rediculous vanity for incouraging it, &c. This Neagle has undertaken to answer and I think has done so very cleverly. Some other person *over or under* (for I do not know which is the most propper) of the signature of gamma has taken up the cudgels on Shaw's side and has written a wishy washy sort of an article to prove the same

thing. So the affair at present stands—what will be the end of it he alone who has in his hands the fate of Empires can determine.

Dorsey has returned from Cincinnati to which he talks of returning to settle but has not determined positivily upon it. He tells me there is some painter there—whose name he has forgotten—so we will have the field to contend for. Write me on all convenient occasions and let me know when you will come up. Harry[4] and myself talk of paying you a visit some time soon. Black and McClellan[5] are boath well.

Yours sincerely,
J. Grimes.

Huntsville Jan^y. 26th. 1831.

My Dr. Bird.

"Unscriptural" I think you called me, well, be it so. I fear I have too justly merited the title in the sense in which you used it if in no other, perhaps the parsons might say the same thing with equal justice but if you would allow me I might give sundry reasons for not letting you hear from me before, such as my uncertainty about the time that I should leave Lexington, &c. &c., for I found it much like the difficulty I had in leaving Phil^a. I wished when I did write to be able to say where you might direct to. I had about two months ago arrainged matters so as to leave in two or three days; a lady of the place having died just at that time the family were very anxious that I should paint a portrait of her, this I had to do from discription as I had not the slightest recollection of her, and after a good deal of trouble I succeeded in making what was considered a good likeness, in the meantime I had to paint two or three others which detained me until the latter part of Dec^r. when I packed up and put off. As the stages had stoped running to Nashville I went to Frankfort and from there down the Kentucky and Ohio rivers to Louisville, where I saw the big bones which you have no doubt seen some

[4] Probably Bird's brother, Henry D. Bird.

[5] Dr. George McClellan, prominent Philadelphia physician.

account of. The account that one of the persons who owns them gave me, was that they were found upwards of twenty feet below the surface of the earth, and arrainged so as to shew very plainly that they had been placed there by the hand of man. Several tusks, upwards of twelve feet in length, formed a circle, within which were placed the several bones of this tremendous animal, which, they say, must have been sixty feet long, and twenty five feet high. With these were some of the bones of an animal of a different species and almost as large, together with some of the bones of an Elephant, of a Lyon, of a horse, of a larger size than of the present day, and what some suppose to be a part of the thigh bone of a man, ten or twelve feet high. These were all arrainged with so much art that there is no doubt but that they were placed there by man; when and by whom all this was done even conjecture is silent. So much for the wonderful in the way of big bones.

After a stay of two days in Louisville I left there in a steam boat for Nashville, and after a very slow and tedious trip of near a week arrived there where I stayed for three or four days and was almost tempted to take up my winter quarters there as I had every reason to believe that I should be pretty well employed but as my things had been sent on to Huntsville I determined to push on for this place after promising to return in the summer. Now comes the d—l. No stages were running between Nashville and this place so I hired a little rat of a horse and took it a horse back, the mud near belly deep much of the way with all the varieties of wether except the good. We had rain hail snow, and excessive cold, with about an half hours sunshine just to mock us. Our ride from Baltimore to Wheeling was a summery day's ride over a McAdamized turnpike to it. After four days of this we arrived here about a week ago. You will percieve from the use of the pronoun *we* that I was not alone. I had the good luck (and I do not speak it ironically) of having a young lady put under my charge at Louisville whom I saw safely to this

place. I am now making arraingements to commence painting with what appears quite flattering prospects though I cannot speak with any certainty yet and my many disappointments will prevent me from being over sanguine.

You ask me about Hunt's portrait. A short time before I left Lexington I was requested to send for it; I did so and received from Mrs. H. the price of it so that matter is settled.

Now let us know what you are about. How comes on the novels. What is Harry about, what is Black about and what are you all about? Give my respects to the above mentioned to Dr. and Mrs. McLellan to Mrs. Allen and family to Mr. & Mrs. Ingersoll to Mrs. Neal to Bridport Rider Otis and a great many other people, if any should complain about my not having writen them make the best excuse that you can for me, put it down to laziness for in truth that is the true cause and I intend to reform in that particular or I am very much mistaken. Write me soon. Please go to Mr. Potts give my respects to him and to Mrs. Potts and tell him that I will write him in a very short time.

Yours sincerely
J. Grimes.

Huntsville March 20th, 1831

Dear Bird.

I am in the land of the living, I am in America, and I am in Huntsville, all three of which questions you may answer in the affirmative to all and every person who may express any curiosity to know any thing about my movements. You have no doubt learned all this before now as I wrote you soon after my arrival in this place, which letter you ought to have received before the date of yours if the mails had have been regular. If you had have received that letter you would not have accused me of betraying no interest in your *crazy concerns* indeed I take a deep interest in them and very much regret that you did not give me a more particular account of them when you wrote me. As you now know where a letter will

find me I will expect you to be more circumstantial and tell me all about them. I am much rejoyced to hear that they are looking up; tell me in what way, tell me the fifty thousand things you speak of, write me the dozen letters and be assured that I will regularly endeavour to respond to them, indeed if you have the least charity in your composition you will write me regularly and often.

My interest for you and curiosity was very much excited a few days since by a friend of mine here informing me that he had seen some account of a Tragedy of yours being in the hands of Forest. I endeavoured to get the paper in which he saw it but it was lost and I have been on thorns ever since so anxious have I been to know more about the matter. Judge of my disappointment then when upon reading your letter I found that you said nothing about it, nor about any of your other concerns.

I have not heard from Dorsey for some months. I wrote him before I left Lexington and requested that he would dirict to this place, he has not done so nor has Powers[6] to whom I wrote about the same time. I know my own failing with regard to letter writing or I should abuse them most confoundedly indeed I do not know why I should not do so at any rate as I get abused for the same thing.

I was much surprised to see by an advertisement in a Louisville paper that Dr. McLellan was attached to a Medical school which was about to be established in Cincinnati, this I presume is a recent affair. Does he intend to reside there? Has the Jefferson school been broken up? Let me know something about that affair.

You tell me that Black has put his whole heart in the drug business. I am pleased to hear it as I presume he will make it profitable and after all is said and done there is much comfort in the profit. Fame is a very good thing in its way but

[6] Hiram Powers, the sculptor, with whom Grimes had apparently become acquainted while in Cincinnati, where Powers had already achieved a reputation for his wax-work exhibitions.

it will not set a leg, neither will money, but it will procure a comfortable couch and that is a great matter. There are few that it would give me more pleasure to see upon a comfortable couch than Black, not with broken leg by the way but surrounded by all the comforts that this life has to bestow. Tell Black that I think he might throw physic to the dogs long enough to write me a few lines.

The Academy you tell me has been reorganized and have resolved to give premiums for painting and sculpture and have further resolved that engraving is not a branch of the fine arts. That is certainly a valuable discovery and is entitled to a medal itself. I shall now know in what light I am to view the works of Morghen Wollet Heath and all those *fellows* whom I have had the ignerance heretofore to consider as artist. For what and in what way are these premiums to be awarded? Give me an account of that matter.

I have heard of Witherspoon since I have been here, nothing more however than that he was in Tuscaloosa last winter. Dr. Fearn whom you will recolect told me that he saw him there but what he is about I am unable to say.

I have recieved much encouragement in the way of promise since I have been here and have reason to think that I will not be disappointed. I have found a great many of my old friends wearing the same faces and same cordial manners as when I left them. And unfortunately a great many of my old enemies too wearing the same faces and same forbidding looks and when I varnished them they stare at me with a certain peculiar unmeaning severity as much as to say this is some of your work; they are not *speaking likenesses* or I have no doubt but they would say a great many severe things about me, their looks however is enough to put me in a fever whenever I meet one of them. Banquo's ghosts were nothing to them for they soon passed away, but these will not pass away until the canvass rots, and I cannot hope for that during my lifetime. I can now have some slight knowledge of how a fellow must feel who is constantly meeting the ghosts

of his murdered victims.

I have not painted many portraits here yet but those that I have painted are I think amongst the best that I have ever done. I hope to be able to give you a better account of my doings when I next write you. Write me soon. Compliments to friends as before.

Yours,

J. Grimes.

Huntsville May 4th 1831

Dear Bird.

I am glad to find that we have been enabled to get clear of the play of cross purposes and that our correspondance can now take a regular course, and I am glad also that you received my first letter as you will now clear me from the charge of not taking a propper interest in your "crazy affairs" the which I hope by this time have sparkled not only like spruce beer but like New ark cider or champaign. You must give me a full and circumstantial account of the whole matter, as by this time it will be all over.

You must not think from what I have heretofore written that my prospects in painting are of that seducing kind that I would not be willing to exchange them for the prospects that a good business of an other kind might present. Painting, to make the best of it, is a kind of a dogs life and poverty at the best appears to be its only reward, for the little fame that attends it is not worth one mug of Hollohans beer, and when I spoke of my prospects it was only by comparison, and in that point of view they might be quite flattering and be no great thing either, indeed a bare present subsistance appears to be the extent of the fairest prospects that I can see before me by following it. Before Black suggested the apothecary business I had come to the same conclusion about the enviable proffession of an itinerant portrait painter and as I have not sufficiently of the grace of God to make me in love with poverty his letter found me in a propper state of mind to

accide to any proposition that would hold out tolerable fair prospects of profit, so that on one part of the subject my mind was soon made up, upon the other however I do not find it so easy I mean a propper place for its location and upon that the whole matter depends. I have taken a good deal of pains to inform myself about every place that I could think of and as yet I have not hit upon any that seems to offer any great inducements for a choice. At the time I wrote to B— Memphis appeared to me the best but upon further information I find that I was mistaken about it. A friend of mine, a physician who lived some time at that place tells me he thinks there are already two in the place. There are some other small towns in that destrict that I have my mind upon and am endeavouring to inform myself about but they are not nor ever will be places of any great importance, and if I should engage in any other business I should wish it to be one that might be extended; now a little retail apothecary shop could afford but little employment and not much profit, all those places that are of any importance or likely to become so appear to be pretty well supplied, so that the only chance I know of is to cut in amongst the rest and elbow somebody out of the way if there should be too many. I have written to obtain some information about St. Louis. That is one of the places that I have tolerable strong hopes about. There has not yet been time to recieve an answer to my enquiries about that place or about Mobile which I have also taken some pains to inform myself. A friend of mine leaves this place tomorrow for the southren part of this state and Florida. I have requested him to gather for me all the information he can, so you will percieve that I have entered into the spirit of the thing as heartily as you can desire.

Another matter has been suggested to me by some of my friends in this place, and if the apothecary scheme does not ripen and bring forth I intend to bear it in mind. That is the Book selling business. There is no establishment of the kind in Huntsville nor in any of the adjoining places—Nashville

which is one hundred miles off and Tuscaloosa which is an hundred and sixty are the two nearest to this place that have establishments of that kind. The country arround this place is the richest in Al$^{a}$.—there is a male and a large female academy established here—and they say it must eventually become a good business. I have not so much faith in it however as I have in the other business if a good place can be found for its location and I shall only look to it as a second anchor in case the first should fail. Now you will see from all this that I am ready to throw the brushes to the devil so soon as a reasonable excuse offers and I pray that it may offer soon.

Those Cincinnati folks have served me a similar trick with yourself. I have not heard from either of them since I left Lex. They are shabby fellows and so am I for not having writen to Harry before this time, but I write to him today.

Respects to all friends—and write me soon.

Yours sincerely

J. Grimes.

Tell Black that if he has not already written me I would be pleased if he would do so soon, I promised to write him again so soon as I could find out something about the enterprize he suggested and assure him that nothing but a good location is wanting to make me join in it at once.

Nashville June 18th 1832

Dear Bird.

I rec$^{d}$ yours of 2$^{nd}$ inst. a few days since. I have been very agreeably cogitating over yours and Blacks letters of the 16 may, you have no doubt rec$^{d}$ mine in answer to it or them and have seen by it that however agreeable it would have been to have followed your suggestions at the time, I thought it more prudent to defer it until my business again became dull, and as there is nothing in nature more uncertain than the business of a poor d—l of a portrait painter, of course I much doubt when that will be, it may be next week or it may not be for 3 months. Whilst it lasts you will understand that I am doing

excellently well, but as by previous and sad experience I make no great calculations upon its continuing a long time I still hold myself in readiness to sieze hold of the very first money making scheme that I see passing. Now of all others Phil[a] would be the place that I would prefer if a reasonable plan would present itself. My wishes upon that subject would I fear be likely to make me judge too favourably of any scheme that would enable me again to enjoy the pleasure of yours and Blacks society.

I regret to learn that a disolution of the partnership of Blacks firm is likely to take place, or I should rather say I regret to learn that there is a necesity for it, more especially as it appears to be only upon account of a difference of views, as to the mode of conducting business. That is one of the difficulties attending all partnerships and has been one of the strongest objections I have had in intering into one. It is not only nesesary that partners should have the most perfect confidence in each others integrity but it is equally nesesary that their views about business should coincide. There can be no certainty of this without well understanding each other before entering into it. Next to a man's care in selecting for a matrimonial connection should be his care in selecting for a business connection, it is true the latter can be dissolved without an act of the Legislature, but is generally at some sacrafice when it does take place and it is always at much sacrafice of feeling before a person is driven to the nesesity.

I wrote to Black a few days since. I had at that time rec[d] a letter from Mr. Tousey given me an account of the Virginia project, its nature its probable profits, &c. He wrote me that the gentleman to whom the overtures were made did not at first give into the idea very readily, he did not at first see the nesesity of dividing the profits of the concern, as he fancied himself fully competent to the management of it himself, and I fear more from a defference to Mr. Touseys opinion than any convictions of his own he finally agreed to the matter. My letter to Mr. T— was shewn him and in it I suggested

the very objections that he made, and of course I do not think them unreasonable. Mr. T— seems to be fully convinced however that the connection would be equally benificial to both. The profits of the establishment as they both estimate them will be between 27 and 28 hundred dolls., this will be when every thing is complete which is not the case at present. I am in much doubt about the matter at present, on the one hand a safe but slow business presents itself to me (*that is if we could agree*). I do not think the calculations are extravagant as to the profits. On the other hand I should have to forego all the pleasures of society. How far I could do so I don't know, never having tried, for you must know that I never spent two weeks at a time in the Country. I sometimes fancy that I could not only become reconciled to it but that I might probably become fond of it, of that however nothing but experience could test the matter, and once into it I should dislike to back out, though Mr. T. writes that if after a year I should chose to do so I could with no other loss than my time. I feel the necesity of very soon coming to a conclusion upon the subject, that is due to Mr. T. and I think will be to my own interests. My engagements here will allow me sufficient time to ponder well upon the subject, in the meantime I would be pleased to hear from yourself and Black as soon as possible, for I must confess that with any thing like good prospects I should prefer the drug business and I believe that under favourable circumstances it might be made much more profitable. My respects to Harry and tell him that if he has not already written to do so immediately for I very much wish to hear from him. Respects to all friends.

Yours sincerely

J. Grimes.

Nashville August 8th 1832

Dear Bird.

I commenced a letter to you a few days ago, when Mr. & Mrs. Brown's arrival here induced me to wait for a few days, that I might have more to write about. They left day before yesterday in the stage for Lexington and then on to Phil[a]. I regret that they made so short a stay, it being only about four days. Mrs. B. is a charming woman and I felt at parting like parting from an old acquaintance, indeed I felt at meeting her pretty much in the same way. Much of that I owe no doubt to yours and Blacks intimacy with her. Yourself and Black were pretty fully discussed. Whilst they staid we, together with Dr. Bacon, rode out to the Hermitage on Saturday, and spent 4 or five hours there very pleasantly, though the great object of attraction has not yet come out, he is expected in a few days when I suppose there will be a great to do here, the citizens are called upon to meet today to make arraingements for his reception. I almost regret that I cannot enter into all of the feelings of the good folks here in that matter, but I am still anti Jackson notwithstanding my visit to the Hermitage—which by the way is as great a misnomer as I have ever heard, for its appearance is like any thing other than the residence of a Hermit, instead of crosses and skull bones the relicts that we find there consist of swords pistols medals &c., and instead of making our dinner off of dry bread and water, as is usual at the cells of Hermits, we had good wine and a well spread board, of that however I was not so fastidious as to complain, as the ride gave me a most excellent appetite. Mr. & Mrs. Jackson are very hospitable and entertain a great deal of company, every body visits the Hermitage. I am told that the Gen[l]. shows to great advantage there. The place itself looks like any other well cultivated farm.

I had been for some time before the reciept of your letter cogitating upon the propriety of visiting Phil[a]. before the cholera had paid you its respects and had pretty much come

to the conclusion that it would be best that I should not. I had no doubt but that you were to recieve a visit from it and had pretty correctly antisipated its effect upon business, this I presume will last but for a short time. I will therefore content myself here until I shall hear that it has departed from amongst you, after it does so we may expect it to lay its hands upon us and then it will be a good time to slip off if it does not prevent it, if it does there is no virtue in temperance for I have foresworn all those things that are set down as likely to promote it, even apple dumplings cannot seduce me from my firm resolve, and I do not play chess least I may perchance loose my temper. Do not suppose from this that I am allarmed about it, but I am determined to give my belly a fair chance, then it and the cholera [*omission*] for it.

Would not this be a good time for you to pay your contemplated visit to the west? Novils will not be read and nobody will go to see Tragedies of course, so as regards your affairs this appears to me to be the best time for you to do so. I think you might collect a good deal of raw material for future use, by the way I have a couple of names that I think you might make use of, they are real names too, they were the parties in a murder that was committed in this state some time ago. Duncan Bonds, commonly called Dunk Bonds, *stabbed* a man by the name of Crunks, whilst he was quietly setting in a country tavern playing the fiddle, now what think you of Crunks & Dunk Bonds for names, ha? I think them equal to if not better than Dempsey Snipes.

As to your visit—I should be much pleased were you to make it before I leave Nashville which I think one of the most pleasant places in the west. The people are disposed to be very liberal and would be so but for the unusual hard times. Gen[l]. Jackson's veto is not likely to mend them much. But for the pressure of the times I have no doubt but that I should have done very well here, as it is I cannot expect to do much.

* * * *

Mrs. Drake left here a couple of weeks since. She told

me that she had seen Sparticus and that it was admirable, she says there is more power in some of the scenes than there is in any plays she has seen except Shakespeares, &c. &c., indeed she spoke in the highest terms of it. Now I was pleased at this as I have a high opinion of her taste and judgement in these matters. When is it to be published?

When you write to Harry give my respects to him and tell the scamp to write me, and do you do so too and that frequently as I shall want to know how the cholera comes on in your city. I wrote to Black two or three weeks ago by a gentleman who was going from here to Phil[a]. I hope he has rec[d] my letter. Tell him to write me.

Yours
J. Grimes

Nashville Sept. 1832

Dear Bird.

Why the d—l don't you write? I have been for the last two weeks most anxiously expecting to hear from you to be assured from under your own hand that you were still in the land of the living and you let me remain in the most profound ignorance as to that fact. I take it for granted that you are for I rec[d] a letter from Harry a few days ago, in which he made mention of you, but—let me stop here I have similar sins of my own to answer for, therefore I can say nothing but in truth I wish you would write for I am anxious to hear from you. Black has foresworn writing I believe, for I have not rec[d] a letter from him for six months at least (*all most*). Now I have not commenced this letter to give a list of grievances or complaints but to inform yourself and Black—and nobody else mind ye—of a project I have some time been thinking of and have very nearly determined about that is in connexion with a gentleman of this place who has had some experience in the business to open a book store here. From all that I have been able to observe I have reason to think that something tolerable fair may be done in that business.

There are two here now, but it will not do to be governed by the number that it will be nesesary to compete with, but rather by the chance of successful competition, in that respect I think our chance will be good. We will have decidedly the most eligable and elegant stand in the place. The house is now being fited up in a very superb style, marble front &c. So far as the stand and the house, its appearance &c., are concerned we will have a decided advantage over any other establishment in the place, and as regards ourselves I think we can manage to secure a pretty good share of business. This chance appearse to me to be a favourable one, as I do not at present expect that it will interfere with what painting I may have to do, as I will have a fine room in the same house to exercise my *craft* in—and whilst I am speaking of painting I may just as well tell you that I have as much at this time as I can attend to; this may continue for some time or it may not, still I think I may calculate upon doing some thing worth while in that way here. How the business of painting and Bookselling may chime together I don't know. Should they not chime well I am determined to let go the least profitable, nor will I let painting interfere with a vigerous prosecution of the other, for she is - - - - not to be depended upon, and besides has kept me a poor man long enough, so if she will interfere I will be devorced from her though I hope that may not be nesesary.

The only thing not altogether pleasant in this is that it will break in upon what my heart has been much inclined to, that is a return to Phil[a]. and a sojourn amongst my good friends there, but I have been afraid of it, you know how it was when I was there before, and though I would not antisapate such hard squeezing again, I could not expect to do as well at painting there, as I can do here at both—and the chance for another business that would promise as fair, would be doubtful. This matter has not been entirely settled though I think that I shall engage in it. I should have liked to have consulted with Black and yourself about it but I should not

have had time since I have taken it in consideration nor will I have time to hear your opinions about it I fear before it will be nesesary for me to decide. No one here knows any thing about it nor do I wish them to until the thing is fully determined upon. I think that I shall be pleased with the business, I know I shall if it proves profitable, it will occasionally require me to visit Phil[a]. though if we engage I will not visit there for the first supply as I should depend more on my partners judgement to lay that in. Afterwards I hope to make myself sufficiently acquainted with the business to attend to that matter when nesesary. I would write to Black but I have not time nor is it nesesary as it would only be a repetition and you will shew him this, which will make him acquainted with my plans &c. When the matter has further progressed or been fully closed I will write him. In the mean time write me and say what you think of it.

Yours sincerely

J. Grimes

Nashville Oct. 26th 1832

Amigo mio.

I rec[d]. your letter of the 11th a few minuets ago. It rejoiceth me much to hear of the success of your Indian. I was apprised of it before I rec[d]. your letter as I sought out every paper that I thought would give any account of it and found that all that I saw spoke in high terms of its success, or rather of its merits and of course of its success. When it is considered that it had to contend with such counter attraction your friend as well as yourself has much cause to be gratified more indeed than if such had not have been the case. I wish that I was in Phil[a]. to rejoice with you. What is to be the next? Do you still hold to the idea of going to Mexico? If I had not entered into that other matter I should have been tempted to have given the rascals a chance to cut my throat. I see by the last accounts they are cutting each others as good christians ought to do. The Texas fever prevails

here to some extent. I felt tempted at one time to venture something in the speculation—250 dolls. will buy the chance for 23000 acres of land, in a country represented as an El Dorado, so healthy that no body has ever been known to die a natural death—unless it may be considered a natural death in that country to have ones throat cut or an ounce ball pass through his entrails. A little further enquiry and reflection convinced me that the chance was rather a bad one, so I determined to keep my $250 and let the Texan lands go to the d—l or any of his imps that might choose to settle on them.

I am glad to find that yourself and Black think well of the Book scheme. I expect that it will be put in opperation some time this winter. The gentleman with whom I am going in partnership will leave here shortly to lay in a stock, and we intend to endeavour to carry it on with spirit and push it as far as it will go. He is a man of enterprise and is acquainted with the business, and I hope to soon adapt myself to it, in the mean time I will go on to paint all the folks that I can catch. I am at present full of business, and have added the painting of minatures to that of portraits so that I nab them upon either tack. Tell Black if he can meet with an oppertunity I would be much pleased if he would send me a few pieces of ivory, say a half dozen or a dozen. Bridport will select them for me. When my partner goes on I will send for a further supply.

You have no doubt heard that the cholera has reached the west. It is making terrable ravages in Cincinnati and Louisville. We are daily expecting it to make its appearance amongst us. Write me soon. Respects to Black and other friends.

Viva una muchos anos.

J. Grimes

Nashville Febr$^{y}$. 2nd 1833

Dear Bird.

Whether Gen$^{l}$ Jacksons post office is to blame at this time or not I do not know, but this I know some body is to blame, for I have not rec$^{d}$. a letter from for some three or four months, although I have written you at least one within that time. That is not much to brag of it is true, but you have some times reminded me of my delinquences and I think it but fair when I get a chance to return the compliment.

You know I wrote you some time ago that I was a going to turn Bookseller. Mr. Ayres who takes this letter is the gentleman with whom I am going into that business. His object in visiting Phil$^{a}$. at this time is to lay in a stock. We expect to go pretty extensively into that business and to connect with it some other matters that may with propriety be added to it such as the selling of music and musical instruments. I have written to Black requesting his assistance in that matter as Mr. Ayres does not profess to know any thing about it. I hope our business will enable me to visit Phil$^{a}$. next fall or winter. Will I probably meet you there should I do so? In your last letter you said some thing about going to Mexico—do you still think of doing so? What are you doing now? Confound you why don't you write and let me know some thing about your affairs?

I am still busily employed—indeed hurried with business—and I have the satisfaction when I am applyed to to paint a portrait to say to the applicant that I cannot paint it for four or five weeks, some I have been fourced to put off for two or three months. Is not that pleasant? But I have no great hope that such a state of things will last long, so I boast of it as it is the first time and may be the last that I can do so. But when I am a Bookseller I will have plenty of employment, whether profitable or not time will determine.

We have the cholera amongst us at last, it has been apparently endeavouring to get a foothold for some 6 or 7

weeks. It at first came in so questionable a shape that it set some of the Drs. by the ears about its identity, now there is no doubt about it, but whether it is endemic or epedemic is a subject of some doubt. It is not yet so general or fatal here as in many of the places that it has visited.

I have given Mr. Ayres a letter of introduction to you. He is a very clever man.

Yours sincerely
J. Grimes

Nashville Ap[l]. 16th 1833

Dear Bird.

When yours of the 26th march arrived here I was in the country where I had went for the double purpose of rusticating and painting portraits from whence I returned only a day or two ago. This will account for my not answering it sooner. However I hope this will reach New Orleans before the time that you have fixed for your arrival there.

I am truly rejoiced at the prospect of meeting you in Nashville, I dreamed of it all the night after I read your letter and have thought of it with delight ever since. I hope we may not be disappointed in Blacks being here at the same time. I had some how or other taken up the idea that he would visit the west this summer but had not the same hope as regards yourself not knowing that any cause such as you speak of would interfere with your contemplated visit to Mexico. At the same time that I regret that you should be disappointed in any thing that you might wish to accomplish I am rejoiced that it should so opperate as to bring you this way. Perhaps all things considered you may not have cause to regret your change of rout. Amongst other causes for making a visit to Mexico at this time peculiarly unpleasant there is much reason to apprehend that by the time that you could get there the cholera may have commenced its ravages, which would make travilling through that country difficult and unpleasant,

although one should not have much fear of it as regards himself. From all accounts travilling through that country is difficult and unpleasant enough at best. So far as bodily comforts are concerned upon that score the rout that you have marked out for yourself presents every facility and comfort that you could disire and I hope may in every other respect present objects of sufficient variety and interest to leave you no cause to regret your disappointment.

Perhaps by the time that you arrive at the mouth of the Cumberland it may be too low to allow steam boats to come up to Nashville but you must not let that stop you as there are stages running at all times from there to this place so there will be no difficulty in getting here. I have set my heart so much upon seeing you here this summer that I shall be very much disappointed if any thing should prevent it. Then if Black should come at the same time what a delightful time we shall have of it. I will endeavour so to arrainge it that we can make an excursion together, through some part of Kentucky as far as the Mammoth cave at least. The fact is you must come. Write me from N. Orleans and let me know when to expect you.

Yours sincerely
J. Grimes

Nashville Nov^r. 17th 1833

Dear Bird.

I rec^d. your letter some few days ago but have been too much engaged ever since to reply until now. I am much pleased with your notion of two months in the Mammoth cave. I think you may make it take, it will certainly be curious and I have no doubt may be made grand. There are many things that would afford fine subjects for the sublime and terrible and you can make them so, and I am doubly pleased with it as it will afford me an oppertunity to see you so soon. Write me soon, and if your notion holds I will meet you there armed with brushes paints canvass &c. though perhaps it would

be as convenient that you come here first as at the time you speak of the boats will be running to this place. At any rate let me know your determination.

You inform me that Black was about to take his departure for Europe. I have never understood what was the object of his visit, is it a secret? If it is not I would like to know. I feel under many obligations to Black for the interest he has taken in my unfortunate affairs, the more especially as it got him into some difficulty with that man Ayres. At least Ayres had the folly to copy and send me two very insulting letters that he had addressed to Black. I hope he did not reply to them. I wrote such an answer to A— as would I presume put a stop to his writting to Black. I requested if he felt in the vein to write any more such letters that he would address them to me. He has written me but once since and then only to say that he would write again. As it was uncertain whether Black would get the communication that I thought it nesesary to send to Mr. Lea I had to trouble you with it, that was in reply to one that Ayres had made to Mr. Lea, which if left unanswered would make it appear that I had acted unjustly toward him. I think that my statement will make it appear otherwise. Curse that business it has given me more vexation and trouble than all my other vexations put together and I am not out of it yet. At the same time my own business calls for all my time and attention. I am now hurried to death almost with it, I have as many pictures commenced as I will be able to finish this winter—indeed for the last two or three months I have been only able to commence portraits, and to put them by for rainy wither to finish. There appears to have gotten a notion abroad that I can paint pictures of dead persons and of persons that I never saw, and I am as regularly called in to paint from dead folks as the coffin maker is to build them their last house, of this however I do not complain, but it gives me much trouble and hurries me a little too much. But enough of this. If you continue of the notion to make further explorations of the big cellar the comming

spring, I will most certainly make time to join you.

Have you read the Harps head? I have not, but have just had a detail of all the particulars of the story of the Harps and their lawless associates, and it appears to me to be the ground work for something that might be made very good. There are other things and many of them too in the history of the early times of old Kentuck that I think would appear well if well told. Try when you come out again to make a longer stay.

We had a grand phenomenon here a few nights ago, Tuesday night I think. I have not heard whether it was seen any great distance from Nashville. It was discribed as a raining of fire. I did not myself see it but it was seen by hundreds. One of the persons who saw it says that from about 2 o'ck. until day light there was a continued falling of meteors of different sizes, and degrees of briliancy, that appeared as thick as flakes of snow in a snow storm. You may immagine the effect of such a scene. The night was perfectly clear and there was nothing that preceeded or followed it that was unusual. Many were much allarmed by it, some thinking that the last day had come. Have you in the course of your reading ever seen any thing of the kind discribed? Thousands were looking out for it the next night but there was nothing of it and it is probable we will not again have such another show.

Write me soon.

Yours sincerely

J. Grimes

P.S. By the way if you meet with an oppertunity send that piece of music out that you spoke of giving to Miss Berryhill, she expresses a great wish to have it and it would give me great pleasure to hear it. We are getting up little musical meetings here and they promise to be pleasant.

Nashville Oct. 12th 1834

Dear Bird.

I rec[d]. yours of the 25th Sept. two days since. It gave me much satisfaction to know that you had safely returned, the more especially as I may now calculate with some degree of certainty on seeing you out here next spring, the which I feared might not be the case when you left, as I thought some thing might occur to detain you longer than you at that time contemplated. I shall calculate upon hearing from you frequently between this and the time you expect to visit here. You must make your arraingements to remain long enough to explore every rat hole in the big cave, and we must go better prepared to make the most of it. Would it not be well to bring along with you a couple of the kind of torches that the watchmen in your city use to light the lamps with? I do not know how they would hold out but they give so bright a light that I should suppose they would answer much better than those they use there for the purpose. I have seen several persons who have visited the cave since we were there, and from their account the Gatewoods speak of us as much the most important characters that they have ever lighted through their dismal cells. We have full credit for the discovery of the fairy grotto, though they seem to have lost the name that we gave it or at least make such a bungle of it that it is difficult to understand what they would be at. I am told too that the Goths and Vandals have laid their distroying hands upon and shorn it of many of its beauties, d—n them. East Tennessee I have no doubt will afford us a fine field for sketching. You must calculate upon taking your time to see and do all that can be done in that way, as I know from accounts there is much sublime and beautiful scenery to be seen in that region.

* * * *

I have been for the last twelve months and am still over head and ears in business. This is all very well you will say, but in truth, I would be pleased if it did not come in so rapidly as I find it almost impossible to finish any thing so that I have a most formidable batch of unfinished pictures on hand,

enough to keep me employed for some months. That d—nable Book business has given me much trouble and vexation but I have got almost through with it at a loss of some six or seven hundred dolls. that is much better than I at one time feared it would be.

I presume that by the time this reaches you your Romance will be out. Could you not send a copy of it to me by mail? By leaving the covers off I presume it would be charged for as periodicals. I am anxious to see it. You have a fine and untrodden field in the country that you have selected for the scene and I hope may make such an impression by your first as will enable you to write others.

Please give my respects to Dr. & Mrs. McLellan. I was somewhat surprised to learn that he was to be run for a chair in the University. They will do well to get him but I would not have supposed that he would have desired it. I wish him success in whatever he may desire to accomplish.

Write me soon.

Yours sincerely

J. Grimes

Nashville Jan^y 12th 1835

Dear Bird.

Since I rec^d your last letter I have been so much hurried and worried and deviled in one way or other that I have not had time to write you. A copy of Calavar had been brought on by a friend and I had the perusal of it before your letter arrived. I was delighted with it and what is better than my approval it is very much liked by all that I have heard speak of it. Now I hoped you have realised from it something more than praise for by the papers that I have seen I percieve you have had a goodly share of that unsubstantial reward. You say that your visit to the west next spring will depend upon the success of that and the one that you are now engaged upon. I hope they will fully answer your expectations in that respect but should they not I make no doubt

I will be in possession of the means to obviate any difficulty upon that score, to which as a mere matter of business you are fully entitled, as I have not forgotten the obligations I am under to you in that respect. So I hope you will not let your want of success (if it should be the case) prevent you from coming out. I have set my heart on seeing you and rambling and creeping and crawling with you through the Mammoth cave. Therefore you must come.

My own business is still as good as I can desire, still more than I can do.

I have given a letter to Mr. Benson—who I introduced to you when you were here[7]—I have also given a letter to Mr. Porter and Mr. Pillow of Columbia, two very particular friends of mine who will visit Phil[a]. after spending some short time in Washington City. I make no doubt you will be pleased with their acquaintance.

Write soon.

Yours sincerely
J. Grimes

Nashville Ap[l] 5th 1835

Dear Bird.

I rec[d] yours of the 4th march in due course and am much gratified at the prospect of seeing you out here this summer. I think we will have a pleasant ramble of it. You must inform me of the time you will leave Phil[a]. so that I may make due preparations to meet you at the Cave, which I should like

[7] This was in June, 1833, on Bird's second visit to the west, when he and Grimes made their first excursion together into the Mammoth Cave.

[8] Readers of Bird's letters which we have printed in Mrs. Bird's biography will recall that the two friends met in October, not at the Cave but at Three Forks, Barren County, Ky., where Grimes arrived, after a night's riding, and found Bird waiting for him at the "best tavern in all Kentuck." From Three Forks they went on together to the Cave, which they explored, as Mrs. Bird wrote, "to their hearts' content, going, as the guides declared, full three miles further than any previous traveller, discovering new beauties and wonders, and enriching their portfolios with many drawings."

to do so soon and no sooner than you get there[s]. Also let me know what you wish me to bring along with me in the way of paints bords (?) &c. I have thought that your plan of making drawings of the cave in opaku water-colours would be the most effective and most expeditious. By using light on a black ground I think the effect could be produced with very little trouble, what think you of it? With regard to the pentagraph I do not know much about the instrument, you may perhaps remember the one I had whilst in Phil[a]. I found that very convenient for either reducing or enlarging but it requires to be swung to the ceiling. If you cannot find a better one I will have such an one made, it is very simple. I have not been able to procure a copy of Haywoods History of Tennessee, none of the Bookstores here have it, I am in hopes that I may find it in some private library.

I for the first time met your old friend Rhea a short time since and told him you would probably be out this summer to take a short excursion through E. Tennessee. He was very anxious that you should do so about the first or middle of may as Dr. Troust (?) and some others, perhaps himself, intend making a tour for the purpose of Geologising Botanising and Natural Historyising about that time. I do not know how it would meet your views, they might be of service in pointing out the object most worthy of note, especially Dr. Troust (?) as he has travilled a good deal through that part of the state. However we will find but little difficulty in hunting them up.

You must let me know when you may expect to be in Lexington if you intend to visit that place for if I can I should very much like to meet you there, but of my ability to do so I have at present much doubt as I have still a great deal of work on hand, but I will make arraingements to "take time" to ramble as much and as far with you as you may wish after we meet at the cave. I have worked hard enough lately to justify me in taking some recreation.

I presume your Infidel will be out before you leave. You must bring it along with you if it should not be probable that the Bookstores here may have it before you get here. I am truly rejoiced to hear that Black is doing so well. When does he speak of returning?

Please give my respects to Dr. & Mrs. McLellan

Yours sincerely

J. Grimes

Chamelion Springs July 2nd 1837

Dear Bird.

I doubt whether or not your knowledge of Geography is sufficiently extensive and minute to enable you to know where the chamelion Springs are: although you have been twice within a short distance of them. And if you should know you will perhaps wonder what the duece brought me here. For your information in the first particular I must inform you that they are in Edmonson Cy. Ky. the same Cy. with the Mammoth Cave and about 12 miles from that place. In traviling over the country to get to this place I could scarcely realise that I was not again going to the cave. Here have I been for something more than a week eating Mush and milk reading the Book of Job and drinking sulpher water. You will perhaps wonder what all this is for. You must know that I was very near leaving this world of trouble about the time or very shortly after I recd. your last Letter, at least so thought the Doctors and my friends and I rather inclined to the same opinion myself at that time. By the blessing of providence and copious bleeding I escaped the Gentleman "what goes about with the sythe" and have so far recovered as to be able to get to this place by easy stages though still very weak and sorely afflicted. About the first of March I was taken with a violent cold or rather the influenzy by which I was confined to my bed for nearly three months during which time I was bled and Physyced until reduced to almost a skeleton. After I commenced to recover it was a long time before I could

gain my strength sufficiently to enable me to start on this trip. I left Nashville about two weeks ago with barely strength to enable me to do so and have gained some little strength since although I gain it but very slowly, and have to fear from that circumstance that the summer will not be sufficient to restore me to my health again, if indeed I am ever again to enjoy that blessing. I very much fear that a trip to the south will be nesesary this winter, if so it will be a great sacrafice of time to me but it can't be helped. Four months already gone and God only knows when I shall be able to resume my business again.

For the purpose of traviling at my leisure and when and how I choose I purchased a little Barouche and horse and hired a boy to drive it. The day after I left Nashville it commenced raining, which stoped me at Tyre's Spring 20 miles from that place, where I remained four or five days, every one of which it rained and was so cold as to require a fire day and night, indeed it appeared and felt more like Oct. than June. Such weather almost choakes me as I find great difficulty in breathing. In dispair I left those springs and came on to these where the same weather has continued except that within the last few days it has not been quite so cold. This place is about 4 or five miles from the road leading from Bowlingreen to Bells amongst the hills where scarcely any body is to be seen especially as the weather is such as to prevent every one from visiting springs. The sun has not shined an hour at a time since I have been here so that my patience has been almost entirely exhausted, notwithstanding the example of the man of Uz. From this I design to go to the Grayson Springs about 30 miles from here where they say there is some 30 kinds of water, each a sovereign remedy for something, perhaps some one of them may suit my case. From there I expect to go to Lexington, after that will be governed pretty much by the state of my health for if I find traviling to improve it I shall keep moving, although I am all anxiety to get to work again.

How do you like the business of Editor?[9] I hope however it may be in other respects you may find it profitable, that is the great matter now-a-days although our most reasonable plans to make and preserve may without any fault of our own be frustrated by some d—nable experiment or other. Still it is very desirable to feel that we have done our best to lay up a little, but all this you know as well as I do and I expect we both practice about alike, that is we can give each other very good advice upon that subject without either practising as we advise.

Write me soon. If you have heard any thing of Black let me know. This will be mailed at Brownsville and I have some doubt if you get it. Give my respects to Dr. & Mrs. McLellan.

Yours sincerely

J. Grimes

The last letter printed above may have been the last which Grimes wrote to Bird. In December (*quoting Mrs. Bird*) "after enduring many troubles and sufferings the most protracted, he was released by death; showing his faithfulness [to Dr. Bird] to the end, for two days holding in his dying grasp the last letter from his beloved friend, which he relinquished only when stiff in death."

[9] Bird had recently become an associate editor of Charles Fenno Hoffman's *American Monthly Magazine*.